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ABSTRACT

A survey of 456 further education (FE) colleges in England and Wales identified the FE sector's activities in providing effective training and development to smaller and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Of 120 colleges that responded, 87.5 percent provided direct training to SMEs; 79.2 percent were developing or acquiring teaching or training materials for SMEs; 76.7 percent had SME partnership arrangements; 63 percent were collaborating with others in provision for SMEs; and 25.8 percent had supply chain involvement. Colleges outlined many elements of good practice, along with a constructive acceptance of difficulties in instigating good relationships with SMEs and in building a regular stream of income from the sector's provision to SMEs. The FE sector continued to invest in building collaborative arrangements and partnerships that increased the effectiveness of its provision to local employers and employees. Colleges acknowledged that the SME sector was an essential provider of local jobs. Other findings were that 94.2 percent of colleges could analyze needs of the market and potential customers; 84.2 percent could drive the demand for learning through mass marketing and promotion; and 86.7 percent could ensure availability of and connect customers to high-quality learning programs. (Appendixes include detailed responses to survey questions and statistical response to survey.) (YLB)

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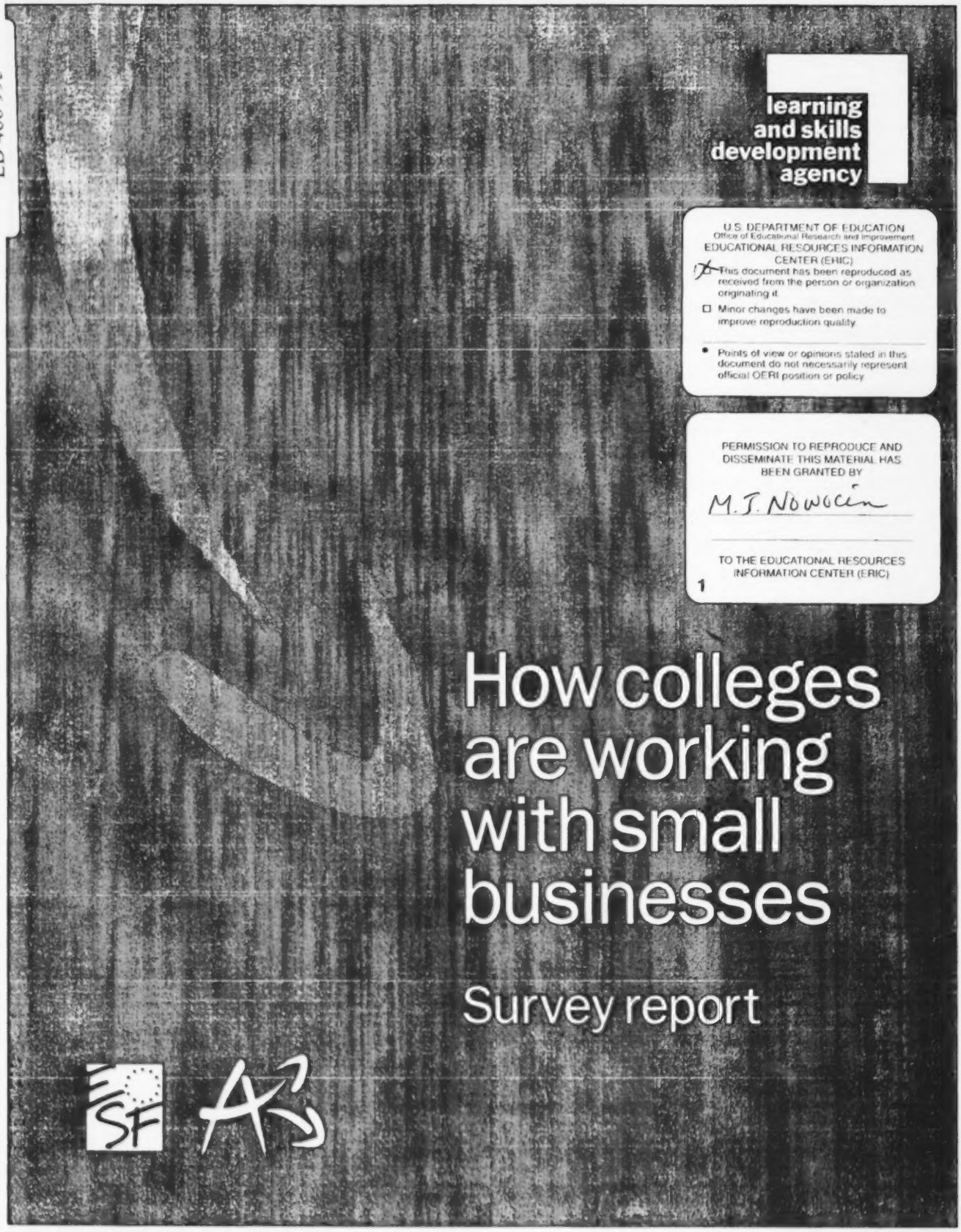

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How colleges are working with small businesses

Survey report

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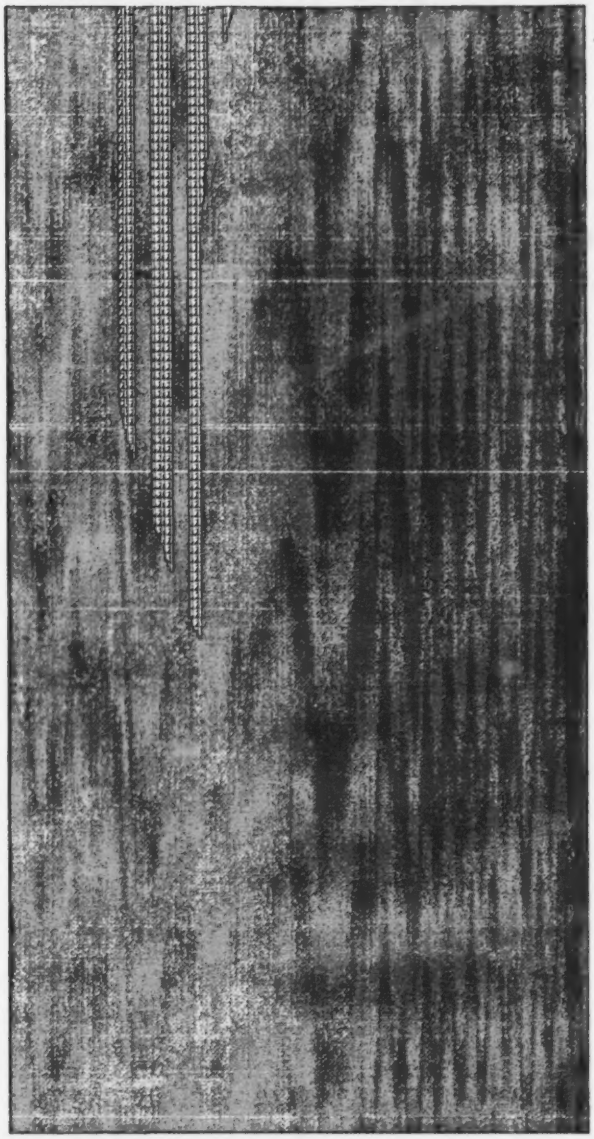

learning and skills development agency

How colleges are working with small businesses

Survey report

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Ro Pengelly was the project worker for the ADAPT FESME VCU project. She also produced the reports on which the following titles in the ADAPT series are based:

Published by the Learning and Skills Development Agency
How colleges are working with small businesses: survey report
How to work with small businesses
How to work with microbusinesses

Other ADAPT publications
ADAPT FESME VCU project report on its survey of smaller firms' views (undertaken with SBRT)
ADAPT FESME VCU project international report
ADAPT FESME VCU project final report

The above reports will be available early in 2001.

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College representatives have assisted in various ways. They responded to the first national survey of college views on working with small businesses in autumn 1998. The project survey also sought views on Ufi and was followed by a national survey that sought views on the new Small Business Service. College representatives also attended events on related issues, including the project's three events during March and April 2000. Although making acknowledgement of particular colleges' involvement risks unfair exclusion, special thanks are due to Barnet College, Farnborough College, Filton College, MANCAT, Gateshead College, Oldham College, Rotherham CAT, Somerset CAT and Stockport College of higher education and further education. These colleges all informed and influenced the project work, as have representatives from many ADAPT projects, including the Marchmont project.

The ADAPT FESME VCU project is also indebted to representatives from small businesses who gave their time in interviews organised through colleges and in representation of membership organisations comprising small businesses across all sectors, and groups of smaller organisations providing specific services, from accountancy through residential care to outdoor recreation.

Lastly, the ADAPT FESME VCU project thanks the TUC, for its interest in encouraging real employment opportunities in a 'market economy'.

Executive overview

This paper reports on a survey of 456 further education (FE) colleges in England and Wales. A total of 120 colleges responded to the survey which was undertaken by questionnaire in October 1998.

The survey provides a baseline, in colleges' self-descriptive terms, that can be developed and against which the FE sector's provision for smaller and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) can be measured.

The survey gives a good indication of the FE sector's activities in providing effective training and development to SMEs. Colleges have become involved in relevant projects and partnerships to enable the development of such provision. Of the colleges which responded:

- 87.5% provide direct training to SMEs.
- 79.2% are currently developing or acquiring teaching or training materials for SMEs.
- 76.7% have SME partnership arrangements to some degree; 63% of the colleges are collaborating with others in provision for SMEs.
- 40% are involved in European Social Fund (ESF) ADAPT (a community initiative funded through the ESF) projects, 28.3% in Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) University for Industry (Ufi) pilot projects, 27.5% in Objective 4 funded projects, 20% in FEFC funded projects, and 11.7% are involved in Centre of Excellence related projects.
- 25.8% have supply chain involvement.

The colleges outlined many elements of good practice, along with a constructive acceptance of the difficulties in instigating good relationships with SMEs and in building a regular stream of income from the sector's provision to SMEs. The FE sector continues to invest in building collaborative arrangements and partnerships that increase the effectiveness of its provision to local employers and employees. It is motivated to invest in this way to sustain and extend good relationships with employers of all sizes, so that one of its activities – to educate 16–19 year olds – best produces young adults who are well prepared for future employment.

The colleges acknowledge that the SME sector is an essential provider of local jobs, and that those in the SME sector need opportunities to develop their services in order to maintain and increase their service levels and provision of good jobs.

The survey responses indicate that colleges support the Ufi initiative; they feel Ufi could give a welcome impetus to FE sector work with SMEs. The survey confirms the colleges' capacity and potential to develop their work with SMEs against the core activities proposed for Ufi at the time the survey was undertaken:

94.2% of the 120 colleges indicated that they can analyse the needs of the market and potential customers.

84.2% can drive the demand for learning through mass marketing and promotion.

90% can provide people with information, advice and guidance.

86.7% can ensure availability of, and connect customers to, high-quality learning programmes.

79.2% can commission new content.

79.2% state their capability to ensure appropriate quality of products and services.

The research context

The ADAPT FESME VCU project aims to assist the FE sector in improving its training and development of SMEs. The ADAPT programme provides support for SMEs to enable them to survive in conditions of significant change in trading and employment conditions. The underlying theory that was tested by the ADAPT FESME project is that increased take-up of learning opportunities related to SME's business needs could result in sustainable improvement in productivity. This in turn will ensure the survival of SMEs, which will thus remain key providers of local jobs and services.

Colleges and other providers of training and development need to ensure that the support they offer is relevant to the business needs of SMEs and available in forms that are accessible and attractive to them. The development of flexible learning through Ufi may be a significant lever in this process.

The Ufi, a public-private partnership, aims to help boost the UK's productivity and competitiveness by enabling individuals, employees and employers to gain knowledge and skills. At the time the survey was undertaken (1998) the Ufi had the following six core activities:

Activity 1	to analyse the needs of the market and potential customers
Activity 2	to drive the demand for learning through mass marketing and promotion
Activity 3	to provide people with information, advice and guidance
Activity 4	to ensure availability of, and connect customers to, high quality learning programmes
Activity 5	to commission new content
Activity 6	to ensure the quality of products and services, e.g. where brokered or commissioned by Ufi.

As the first step of the ADAPT FESME project, a baseline survey of FE colleges in England and Wales was undertaken to evaluate existing FE sector activity and good practice to support SMEs, and of the capacity within FE colleges to deliver and support Ufi activities.

The survey comprised 21 main questions with sub-questions. The questions fell into four categories.

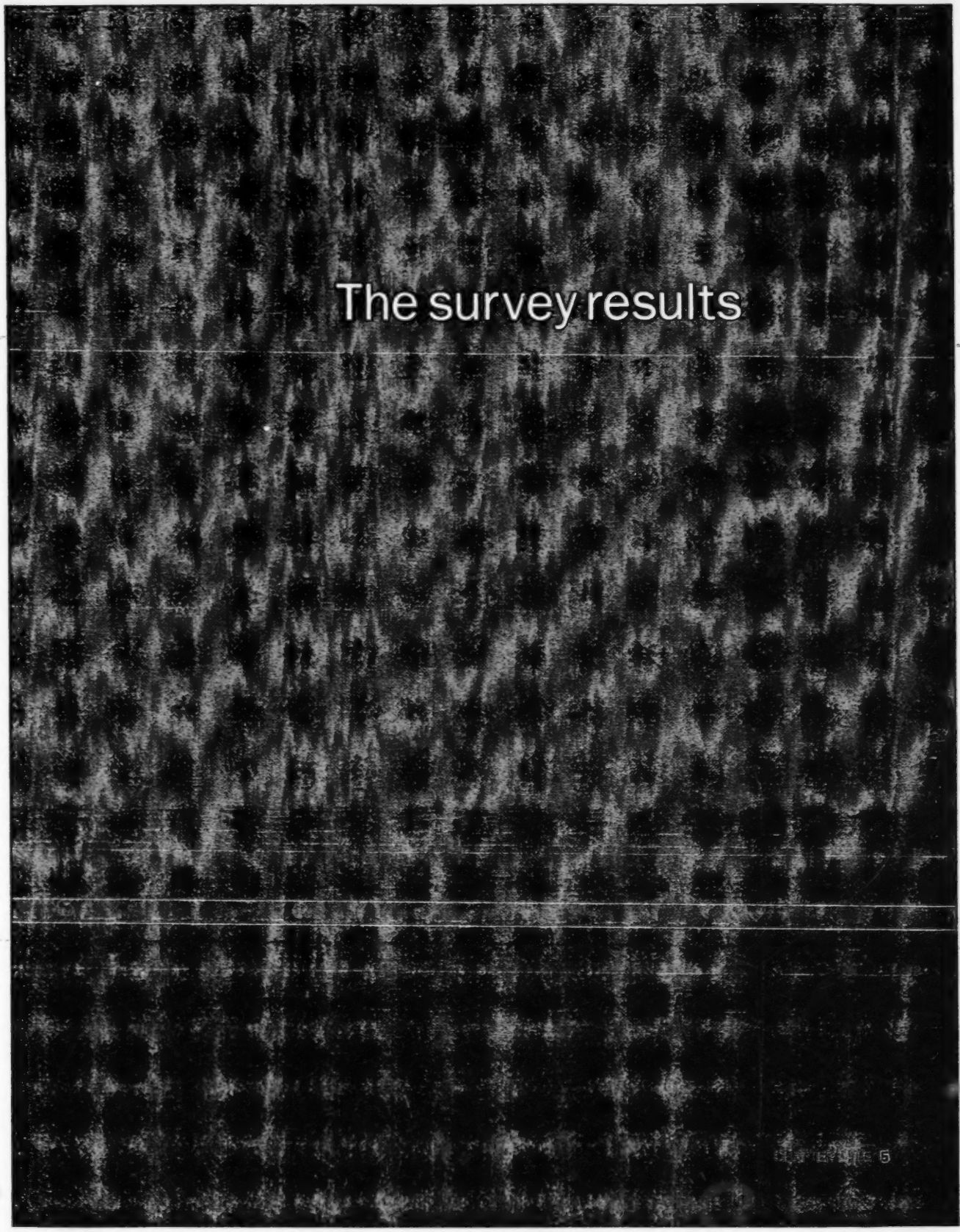
Colleges were asked to describe their activities with SMEs. The colleges' views on how the proposed Ufi functions could be supported to progress their work with local communities were sought, along with details of the colleges' strategies towards industry generally. To provide an overall context, the colleges were also requested to provide information regarding their full-time and part-time student numbers, their annual budgets and FEFC unit totals, additional project funding and of their Information and Communication Technology (ICT) work.

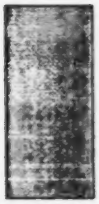
The survey of FE colleges was undertaken in October 1998. Questionnaires were sent out to 456 colleges in England and Wales 120 FE colleges responded.

A representative selection of text responses has been included in the Appendix, to highlight good practices. Where more than one response has included the same element of good practice, only a few or one response has been reproduced.

Some of the returns contained a number of unanswered questions, but all returns were usable for analysis to a greater degree.

Each question's statistical summary is based on the returns received for that question.


The survey results



SME-related project activity

The 456 FE colleges in England and Wales were requested to provide information about their involvement in current projects which have SME-related content. The survey results are based on the 120 colleges which responded.

Colleges receiving FEFC–Ufi pilot funding

28.3% (34 colleges) of those responding to the survey are receiving FEFC–Ufi pilot funding, and undertaking a range of projects.

Some of the projects are working to improve colleges' internal online systems or to enhance their marketing work by constructing college consortium websites and by developing electronic course directories. Some entail capital purchase of hardware for internet connection and interactive learning using new technology (ICT). Other projects aim to enable colleges to evaluate software materials or to collaborate in the development of new materials.

Sources of funding

The survey enquired about different specific funding sources; FEFC funding, Centre of Excellence related funding, ESF ADAPT project funding and Objective 4 funding. Colleges were requested to describe up to two projects for each funding category, and to indicate whether their institution takes the leading role or a supporting role for each project. Four sets of statistics for each of the four specific funding types were obtained. This report takes the most common set of statistics for each funding type: lead institutions for FEFC funded projects, Centre of Excellence projects and Objective 4 projects; and support institutions for ESF ADAPT projects.

Colleges undertaking FEFC projects

20% (24 colleges) of those surveyed described funded FEFC projects they are included in.

Some projects involved feasibility studies to see how local provision for 16–19 year olds could be rationalised. Some were collaborative projects with other colleges to provide access to IT software via the internet. Other projects aimed to widen participation: by providing free IT training at an outreach centre; by establishing an SME support service; and by the development of ICT delivery, especially for work with SMEs.

Colleges with Centres of Excellence

11.7% (14 colleges) of those surveyed outlined their Centre of Excellence projects which are collaborations involving FE colleges and, for instance, Higher Education (HE) and Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs). The projects reported are to develop computer-integrated manufacture, computer-aided design (CAD) and other high-technology processing training and development facilities. They aim to serve specific UK regions, and perhaps utilise IT-based interactive remote access.

ESF ADAPT projects

40% (48 colleges) of the 120 colleges surveyed described SME-related ESF ADAPT projects.

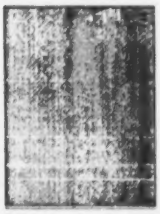
The ESF ADAPT projects varied from those looking at how learning in SMEs can be enhanced with the application of a Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT) system, through development of online training modules for SMEs, to generation of good practice in delivery to SMEs.

Objective 4 projects

27.5% (33 colleges) of those surveyed detailed SME-related Objective 4 funded projects. These varied from projects to recruit staff in non-traditional areas and to train trainers and assessors for specific industries, through to projects aiming to establish groups of SMEs to target for training purposes. The responses also included a project that is specifically targeting small voluntary sector groups.

Colleges' involvement in any other SME-related projects

Colleges had been funded from various sources other than above. Some are funded from the European Union, for instance for projects to improve career guidance and to provide online training/business support for SMEs. The Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) funds are being accessed to improve the skills of employees of local business as part of economic regeneration planning. Some projects are supported by local Chambers of Commerce and employers, while further ones are supported by TECs and UK government departments.



Partnerships

Partnership arrangements with SMEs

The colleges were asked to describe their partnership arrangements with SMEs. This is a key question as 'lifelong learning' in SMEs may best take root if training, support and development is made available to them in many and small amounts. However, delivery in very small amounts is not always commercially feasible, even with a great deal of planning and good management on the part of providers. Meaningful partnership arrangements between the FE colleges and their local communities of SMEs are fundamental to the provision of effective training at a cost which is acceptable to all the partners. SMEs are numerous across the UK; their numbers and diversity present a great challenge to training and development providers.

76.7% (92 colleges) of the 120 FE colleges surveyed indicated they have SME partnership arrangements to some degree.

The partnerships' descriptions varied widely. A few were with individual organisations, predominantly local branches of large employers or training providers. Some individual smaller firms have partnership arrangements for specific projects, for instance, through the provision of work placements for college students on sandwich courses.

Many partnerships involve local business organisations, including Chambers of Commerce, and government-funded agencies, including TECs and Business Links. Such partnerships are good in the long term in the sense that relationships may depend less upon a given period of funding. A weakness may be that the business organisations and agencies may be in competition with the FE colleges to provide training and support to local SMEs. Such competition may be detrimental to both further education and the SMEs.

A minority of partnerships were based on the occupational sector, for instance, services such as retailing, care and tourism, farming and engineering. Only a very small minority of responses implied that local SMEs were targeted for their size, independence, whether they are incorporated or not, or whether they are in the voluntary or private sector.

Targeting is crucial as the needs of these different types of firms are different, and the methods of marketing and of training need to reflect these differences.

Many colleges had partnership activities resulting in some tangible 'end products', for instance, funding for a computing centre or help-desk service for small firms. These activities could enable initial funding to reap long-term benefits for the FE colleges and their neighbourhoods. Other partnerships prepared their students for the future by arranging work experience placements in local smaller firms. This is a good way of creating a partnership in the long-term for the good of the student, as the college may better prepare its students for future work, which is more likely to be in local smaller firms if larger organisations continue to down-size and move their operations abroad.

Perhaps a reason for such a variation in the types of partnership was 'initiative' and 'support agency' overload. There need to be local solutions to local conditions, but partnership activities are best when SMEs are not targeted by too many different initiatives.

Involvement in SME industry supplier chains

25.8% (31 colleges) of those surveyed do have supply chain involvement to some extent, but the majority (80 colleges) do not.

The relatively low incidence of supply chain involvement by FE colleges may reflect the absence of large companies in many parts of the country. Supply chain involvement with FE colleges has usually been instigated by large companies. Some colleges have overcome this in two ways; they have targeted purchasers in specific trades, for instance, the food trade and building trade, or they have targeted general issues which affect many purchasers irrespective of their industry. Such general issues include, for example, management and IT training, and health and safety training for sub-contractors going into certain types of company sites.

Involvement in related FE sector partnerships involving SMEs

63.3% (76 colleges) of the 120 colleges surveyed are involved in FE sector partnerships for their SME-related work. Such partnerships can optimise the sector's resource to manage the design, instigation and provision of training and support for effective work-based learning within SMEs.

College collaboration or partnership with HE

85% (102 colleges) of the 120 colleges surveyed have collaborative or partnership arrangements with higher education institutions (HEIs).

Many of the colleges provided information about their affiliations with particular HEIs, and with their work to ensure students could progress from FE to HE. Only one mentioned collaboration with HE specifically in relation to SMEs; this was to co-ordinate the effort to find placements in SMEs for students as well as linking with the Teaching Company Scheme. No college mentioned any activity with HE regarding development of SMEs sited in 'incubation' units while taking forward, for example, research results or training packages to commercial exploitation.

Direct training offered to SME staff

87.5% (105 colleges) of the 120 colleges surveyed provided direct training to SME staff.

Of the 105 colleges providing direct training:

- 89.5% (94 colleges) train on employers' premises.
- 90.5% (95 colleges) train SMEs on college' premises.
- 69.5% (73 colleges) train using distance learning.
- 61.9% (65 colleges) utilise ICT.

A small number of colleges provide direct training to SME staff covering subjects which relate to specific sectors, for instance, tourism, retail and care. The majority of colleges provide generic training on subjects which apply to firms across all sectors, for instance, IT training, management, finance, accounting and telesales.

Traditional part-time courses, on a day-release or block-release basis, continue to be delivered on colleges' own premises. Some colleges offer full-cost training to employers and some offer training at reduced cost, for instance, subsidised by TEC funds.

A growing number of colleges have set up commercial units to co-ordinate their delivery of training and development to firms. These include dedicated business training facilities, and IT or Telematics Centres.

The delivery of assessment of NVQs and Modern Apprenticeships may take place on employers' premises, for all sizes of firms. However, attendance by a member of college staff for course delivery purposes in the workplace may be predominantly limited to larger workplaces.

An increasing number of SMEs use supported distance learning for their staff training and NVQs. Colleges make training packages and other distance learning materials available to employers. The employers and their staff can then work through packages on their own and at their own pace. They are able to call on a tutor for support by telephone or e-mail. In some cases, colleges also provide local firms with hardware to enable them to access learning packages and e-mail facilities.

Accessing the internet and e-mailing are the most commonly implemented uses of ICT, although the uses of CD-ROM and web-sites are becoming more common. Video-conferencing is being used but is mostly in exploratory stages. It was unclear how much integration of ICT into courseware remains in the stages of prototyping and development, and concern was raised that many of those working in SMEs remain unfamiliar with all or some of these new ICT facilities.

Developing or acquiring related teaching or training materials

79.2% (95 colleges) of the 120 colleges surveyed are either developing or acquiring teaching or training materials, to some extent.

The survey did not distinguish between development and evaluation to produce new courses to fill gaps in provision, and work solely to incorporate ICT facilities into existing, proven courses. Both can enable new learners to access courses, and the latter may also reduce some costs, for instance of purchasing paper-based library and learning resources.

The colleges recognised the very high investment that is required to produce teaching and training materials. Some have invested in developing materials and some have acquired packages. Both development and acquisition of computerised materials require integration into courses, which is a taxing undertaking for teaching staff. Some colleges had invested in familiarising their staff with various ways in which computer-based resources can enhance their courses. This is an essential step, so that staff are able to take part in the evaluation of new designs prior to courseware development or of existing packages of materials. If college staff are outside these evaluation processes, they may feel less able and less motivated to adapt their courses to integrate the newly developed or acquired teaching or training materials.

Certainly a large amount of effective computer-based materials is required as colleges invest in IT centres and in the delivery of learning and development to SMEs, either in the IT centres or for use on the SMEs' own premises. Some of the materials that are helpful to those in SMEs could also be used to prepare college students for working life, either in the long term after college or more immediately for those students about to start their workplace assignment within sandwich courses.

Staffing provision for SMEs

82.5% (99 colleges) of the 120 colleges surveyed have college-based tutors.

Colleges clearly stated their preference to use full-time permanent staff to deliver to SMEs and use outside supply only as need arises.

Only one college explicitly mentioned that its team of tutors receive specialist development. The need for specialist development will be heightened, as tutors increasingly visit SMEs' premises or places which are convenient for groups of SMEs to meet outside the college premises. Tutors also require the specialist skills to be able to assist SMEs with their analysis of training needs and formulation of training plans, as well as being able to help demonstrate that the plans will enable the SMEs' profit levels to be sustained, and ideally grow. The training plans need to be compatible with corporate initiatives in areas such as productivity and profit improvement, and consistent with job retention or expansion.

Note: The answers to this part of the survey may not truly reflect the de facto position; an increasing number of tutors may not be based on colleges' main sites, but may work from home or in a college centre which is remote from the main campus.

Developing or acquiring SME-based mentors

45% (54 colleges) of the 120 colleges surveyed indicated that they have developed or acquired SME-based mentors.

The text responses revealed an ambiguity in the role of mentoring. This may be due to different interpretations of the roles of tutors, assessors and mentors, as well as to colleges focusing on the NVQ system's requirement for mentors rather than the SME learner's requirement.

Only a very small minority of colleges specifically mentioned that mentors from the SMEs may be involved in training at employers' premises. Using mentors with no experience of working in SMEs, for instance, using students on NVQ in management programmes or middle managers from large corporations, may well lead to an 'inappropriate' learning experience.

Mentors may be key to ensuring that work-based training is related to the learner's work situation. They also ensure that learners have the required entry or foundation qualifications and can highlight where blocks of rigorous, technical learning are required, perhaps by day or block release. Mentors are able to feed back to colleges where work-based learning modules have become overly academic and inappropriate to the SME workplace. In a large organisation, this role would be undertaken by personnel specialists so that the training and development requirements are specified to outside suppliers, like FE colleges. However, the majority of SMEs do not have specialists in personnel matters, so they need to have effective assistance within the mentoring role.

As computerised learning at a distance becomes more common, mentoring in the form of a 'buddy system' is essential, to ensure learners do not become demotivated due to technological reasons. This element of mentoring is distinct from the mentoring required for the 'learning experience and ownership' and for the NVQ system, and may well come under colleges' help-desk functions. Again, large organisations will have technology experts able to resolve technology-related problems and queries, usually without reference to outside suppliers. However, many SMEs may have no such specialists on their staff, and may have to rely on outside trainers to provide the technological support as well as deliver the learning and development aspects. It is understandable that colleges' responses to this part of the survey were so varied.

Developing practice in supporting SMEs

Adapting cultures

A major lesson learnt by colleges (per the 117 responses to Question 18) has been to draw on their strengths and adapt traditional cultures to provide successful new ways for people in SMEs to access learning. These changes involved major investments in staff retraining, in implementation of ICT mechanisms and in developing appropriate training and development courses. This development is not insignificant, whether in the development of new courses or in the 'repackaging' of existing ones.

ICT support

Colleges also acknowledged how fundamental it is to allow a large amount of time and energy during the selection of ICT facilities and computerised learning systems, as these form the backbone that supports everything else.

Colleges that have succeeded in forging relationships with local firms have been those that have invested in extensive staff development programmes. They have done so to familiarise their academic staff with ICT basic principles and hardware. This is essential to enable ICT to be embedded into the curriculum, and to enable colleges to create an infrastructure to increase the delivery of online and distance learning. Some colleges consider that they will need to maintain physical outreach centres and mobile training facilities until typical students become more confident of ICT and perhaps less shy of colleges.

Supporting online learning

Colleges also agreed that regular contacts and visits by their staff to employers' premises remain essential, even though perhaps most of the training and development can be delivered effectively by distance learning and through out-reach centres, and supervised by a course tutor. Colleges also stated how critical it is to have tutor support available to assist students by telephone or e-mail on an ad hoc basis, and have noted that the skills required to provide such interactive support are new.

Tutors supporting distance learning need to have the vision and expertise to use the new technologies and feed back to the college when their students fail to access good learning materials or when there is a lack of guidance in course objectives.

Appropriate materials

Colleges note that essential good materials are not widely available. This may be due to a scarcity of appropriate market research, since few SMEs have time to fully understand the NVQ system or to be aware of the courses which the college offers them. A lot of contact with SMEs is required to ensure material content is relevant and updated on a regular basis, otherwise the development of relevant, integrated curriculum materials will remain difficult.

Colleges acknowledge the patience which is needed with SMEs, as working with them can be time-consuming, frustrating and financially unprofitable. Colleges find many SMEs do not have specialists capable of doing training needs analysis or relating their needs to appropriate NVQs, both of which are essential to enable colleges to deliver relevant courses, or to evaluate spending resources on adapting or tailoring courses.

Developing mutual understanding

A barrier to colleges' provision may be simply that employers are unaware their local college has the staff with the relevant experience, available on a flexible basis, to assist them in managing their businesses. Equally, colleges may be frustrated by some SMEs focusing their requests on training 'just in time' for them to conform to new regulations and seemingly unable to take a long-term and planned view of their training requirements. However, this could be seen as an opportunity to address 'first principles management techniques' at the same time as addressing the more immediate regulation requirements.

To support their students in SMEs successfully, colleges try to make them feel part of a group, even if the group meets only once during an induction session. Such an initial session also ensures that students understand the concept of independent learning, and find it suitable to them as well as being practical to their employers. It also enables colleges and local firms to meet and get to know each other, and so form the basis of an effective and ongoing commercially based partnership.

Colleges' policies and strategic plans

The colleges' responses to the issues raised in the survey appear to confirm that they see the activities fitting into their policies and strategic plans. The provision for SMEs enables them to widen participation by:

- targeting under-represented groups, including adult learners working within SMEs, to enable them to achieve career qualifications and updating
- using ICT to deliver supported learning to large numbers of people and on an easy access basis (even on a 365-days-a-year basis)
- shifting away from 'what the college can provide' to 'what learners require'
- encouraging access to individuals who traditionally were unable to attend college, by new marketing and promotional initiatives, by ICT and by outreach centres.

Some colleges are involved in targeting SMEs to:

- develop commercial activities to increase non-FEFC income, and so reduce dependency on FEFC funding
- support the economic development and increase prosperity of their sub-regions, through supporting local businesses and by contributing to local strategies in economic regeneration.

Local businesses and communities are well served by colleges that enhance their core activity for teaching full-time 16–19 year old students by increasing students' familiarity with ICT, and therefore making them better equipped for working life.

Other college links with industry and business

The colleges outlined their links with 'industry and business', in addition to that already described in relation to activities with SMEs and within partnerships.

Colleges are linked with local businesses by their involvement in business forums and consultative panels. Colleges also actively contact firms individually and through advisory groups and course committees to seek employers' views on training and development issues and for curriculum input.

One college specifically mentioned further links it has been able to forge with its local private and public sector employers, through its lead partnership on the New Deal initiative.

Local companies send students to colleges and provide work placements, work experience and work shadowing schemes for students, all of which establish links between colleges and their local employers. Further links can be developed through many Education Business Partnership activities involving full-time students, including Young Enterprise, the Neighbourhood Engineering and other engineering-related schemes, and the provision by employers of mock interviews.

There are two other ways reported by colleges in which effective links are built with local employers. Firstly, some college governors are from local commerce and industry. Secondly, local firms have sponsored events and provided capital and equipment for colleges' major projects.

Colleges' views of the University for Industry

The move to a Ufi approach is seen as a natural progression by the survey respondents, as its functions take forward activities which are already operated by the colleges, as described in this report.

Ufi can help build on already forged local partnerships, the existing close collaboration between colleges and universities and established links between FE colleges and their local employers.

Survey respondents said that Ufi could assist the FE sector in its work with SMEs in a number of ways by:

- providing valuable impetus by acting as a 'broker' service for course information, guidance and progression.
- helping to reduce the evaluation cost of finding new course provision.
- helping to reduce the development resource required to produce new or tailored learning programmes.
- ensuring that its model addresses SMEs as a distinct part of adult education provision; delivery to an independent adult only needs to benefit that individual, whereas delivery to SMEs needs to benefit two parties: the student and the student's employer.
- playing a key part in refining the use of national funding of business support and associated infrastructures, so that a long-term solution to funding the provision of training and development to smaller firms is determined. In the shorter term, some colleges may be able to subsidise their SME training provision, for instance, where they have received a monetary award for a specific SME or IT-related project. A subsidy is usually required to instigate a college's infrastructure to provide services to SMEs, but may also be required to provide a guaranteed amount of resource to sustain such infrastructures once they have become established.

Colleges' capacity to support Ufi core activities

The survey revealed that the FE sector can make major contributions to the success of Ufi, in its core activities for 16–19 year olds, in its provision of adult education and in its delivery of training and development within the SME sector. The FE colleges' capability to support the Ufi's six core activities is now outlined, for each of the activities.

Analysing market needs

94.2% (113 colleges) of the 120 colleges surveyed indicated their capability to analyse the needs of the market and potential customers.

Colleges use local labour market information from sources maintained by the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE), and by their TECs, county and local authorities and Chambers of Commerce. Colleges do not rely wholly on these sources, and gather intelligence through local employer liaison groups and in consultation with local firms and strategic partners. In some cases, colleges conduct their own primary research projects and spend resources building their own banks of local and regional information regarding skill gaps, employment trends, social attitudes and industry needs as appropriate, to inform and direct strategic planning, for instance, of short course provision.

This indicates that colleges do have the capability of supporting Ufi in analysing market need, but only by individually expending resource doing their own market research. This individual effort may be required because other surveys cover larger local employers to the exclusion of the smaller ones in the private and voluntary sectors.

Driving demand for learning

84.2% (101 colleges) of the 120 colleges surveyed indicated their capability to drive the demand for learning through mass marketing and promotion.

Colleges are managing to promote themselves in a wide variety of ways, at local, regional and national levels. They achieve this by broadcast campaigns, press campaigns and direct promotions, for instance, by offering short 'taster' sessions in 'high street learning shops' away from their premises. Colleges achieve their wider promotion by establishing telemarketing units and by participating in training initiatives.

Colleges, with their good local links, are well placed to support Ufi in driving up the demand for learning, but perhaps on a less than 'massive' scale due to limited resources. They would, however, reinforce messages on a local basis and time their own marketing campaigns to match those of Ufi.

Providing advice and guidance

90% (108 colleges) of the 120 colleges surveyed indicated their capability to provide people with information, advice and guidance.

Colleges have initial points of contact via dedicated telephone lines, within outreach centres (e.g. in high street locations) and via the internet from their websites. Some colleges may best serve their SMEs by providing a local initial point of contact which effectively co-ordinates such assistance provided by colleges, Business Links, TECs and local authorities.

The colleges follow up these initial enquiries in different ways. In some colleges, facilitators in commercial units or new Centres of Excellence to provide general guidance and sign-posting to all callers. In other cases, colleges refer their callers to appropriate vocational subject specialists.

Once colleges have matched appropriate training solutions to prospective students from SMEs, they may use tutors and mentors (as described in response to questions 16 and 17) to provide further advice and guidance regarding the proposed specific courses.

Colleges are well placed to support Ufi in providing advice and guidance for individuals, but perhaps many are currently revising the ways in which they provide local SMEs with information, advice and guidance.

High quality learning programmes

86.7% (104 colleges) of the 120 colleges surveyed indicated their capability to ensure availability of, and connect customers to, high quality learning programmes.

Colleges work to provide two main progression routes for their core students. One is the route by which students can progress toward additional study at a university. The other route can progress students towards local employers for work placement and employment purposes. Much work is being carried out to refine and enhance these two routes.

The routes by which colleges enable new students from SMEs to progress are much less clear. An initial barrier to many training purchasers in SMEs, is that they may have very little knowledge about current NVQ development and of its assessment processes. Training providers may have to overcome this initial barrier, as subsidy of their income may depend upon their provision leading to NVQ qualifications. Another potential barrier to the progression route for SMEs within college provision is where colleges start to map the route from traditional adult education delivery, as such provision may not be closely related to business needs, in content, by delivery or in assessment.

Some colleges refer initial enquiries from SMEs to other local providers, if it is unable to provide the appropriate training or development. However, the decision to make such referral, and so play the 'honest broker', can be increasingly difficult if colleges feel under pressure to generate an income stream by selling their own training and development provision. On the other hand, making such referrals makes good commercial sense for providers as it avoids the expense of developing one-off courses. It is better for all parties: the college saves unnecessary expense, the other provider gains additional business providing tried and tested services, and the SMEs can gain a more appropriate, higher quality learning experience.

Commissioning new content

79.2% (95 colleges) of the 120 colleges surveyed indicated their capability to commission new content.

The colleges indicate their capability of commissioning new materials and courses, within financial constraints and their staff expertise, including the skills which are required to map course programmes to nationally recognised qualifications.

New material and course development can be in response to local demand for which colleges have no supply, or in strategically planned development to stimulate demand. Some colleges reduce the amount of course development investment by co-ordinating their work with neighbouring colleges in their areas.

However, colleges have learnt the lesson of carefully evaluating what is already available from other sources (as noted in the responses to Question 18), so that they can find 'off-the-shelf' packages and so avoid expensive new commission and duplication of effort. If the Ufi initiative can make the process of finding existing courses easier, then individual college's resources can be saved during the package evaluation process.

None of the colleges responding to the survey specifically mentioned their duplication of effort due to specialists rejecting 'off-the-shelf' solutions on the basis that they had 'not been invented here'. The sector may by now have developed many courses for management and business, for IT, and other general aspects, like food hygiene, health and safety and first aid. Even the additional work to make an existing course more practical would take less resources than starting again from scratch on an individual college basis.

Quality assurance systems

79.2% (95 colleges) of the 120 colleges surveyed indicated their capability to ensure the quality of products and services.

Colleges have well-developed systems for the delivery of their services, including making appropriate submission of new course proposals and annual submissions to boards of study, curriculum teams and academic standards committees. Colleges are assessed by bodies external to them, including the FEFC and TSC inspectorates, funding bodies, those providing 'Kitemarks' including ISO 9002, and by awarding bodies.

It was unclear how many colleges currently apply their quality procedures as rigorously to their delivery to SMEs as they do to their traditional core activities. The evaluation of feedback from learners in SMEs may raise issues which are problematic to colleges' core students. For instance, the preparation of portfolios for assessment purposes may have become so over-cumbersome that the anticipated benefits of the learning and development have been lost. Quality problems can also arise even when the course objectives seem to be a perfect match with SMEs' requirements.

All sizes of SMEs may wish to improve productivity, payment-reward and performance management. However, the learning materials required to achieve these objectives can be very different. The SME with 50 or more staff with a formal departmental structure usually requires a different set of learning materials to the more common SME which has fewer than ten staff, where there is no formal departmental structure, and the owners and shareholders remain involved in the operational work. This area of course design evaluation is key to the Ufi's effectiveness in fully realising its aim to raise smaller firms' sustainable productivity and 'competitiveness', and consequently the SME sector's provision of good services and local jobs.

Removing barriers between SMEs and support providers

The colleges described how they forge relationships with local SMEs, with varying levels of success. As established institutions within local communities, the colleges are ideally placed to play a key role in the development of long-term relationships with local organisations and in the provision of training to their staff. They have put significant resources into gaining local knowledge and in building good working relationships, to surmount the real barriers in dealing with SMEs.

Difficulties in instigating relationships with local employers

As with any relationship, both parties need to acknowledge their need for each other so that the relationship can be mutually beneficial. Traditionally, colleges provided courses for local employees, through night classes and on day or block release. Local large employers typically had technical and commercial apprentices in training and employed new recruits educated in various disciplines by the college, so could readily recognise the value of the college's core work. These larger employers had an adequate margin of profit to invest in providing work experience placements for college students and staff and, perhaps, in sponsoring college or other education-based projects, in cash or in kind. However, the demise of many larger organisations has altered this stable basis and the proportion of small local employers has increased. SMEs have fewer employees, so they have less opportunity to know of the college's work through recruiting college-educated local people. When compared with a large organisation, the typical SME works on a slimmer profit margin which leaves it with less capacity to make investment in education-based projects in local schools and colleges. Consequently, many smaller employers may be unknown to the local college and may be unaware of the college's work or most recent reputation.

Many colleges run special events including 'taster' evenings, to overcome the barrier of instigating relationships with employers.

Development of ongoing relationships is a lengthy process, which can be retarded by overt pressure to sell services or by a lack of the realisation that representatives in smaller and larger organisations may have to be approached in very different ways. One major difference is that the larger organisation will usually have employees who are specialists in training and regulatory issues, whereas the smaller one may lack this specialist knowledge and depend upon gaining adequate background information during preliminary discussions with the college. However, dealing with smaller organisations can in some ways be simpler than dealing with larger ones, as smaller ones can often make contractual and purchasing decisions much more quickly than larger ones can.

Colleges acknowledge the importance of having appropriate staff to deal with SMEs, both for pre-sales work and for delivery of properly supported and effective learning. There may still be some staff in colleges who are uneasy with the concept of profit making and the business ethic.

Staff dealing with owner-managers of smaller local firms need to understand that personal profit-making is in conjunction with responsibility for all of the risks of their enterprises, along with the responsibilities involved in selling sufficient products and services to sustain those enterprises. Voluntary and community sector SMEs are not always seen as being 'profit-making', but also need to be run in a business-like way, or if their expenditure exceeds their income and drains their reserves, then they cease to exist as a going concern. Staff delivering to the SME sector need to feel that the sector's provision of much-needed jobs justifies patient nurturing, so that local employees, colleges and communities all benefit in the long term. Whilst the larger organisations continue to shed jobs, the smaller organisations will have an increasing role to play in local job provision, retention and development.

Finding out and understanding the value of local assistance and training

Along with the primary demand for core skills training, SMEs may require external assistance for many other reasons, for instance, due to new legislation. Some legislation may apply solely to organisations in specific sectors, such as food hygiene in the catering sector. The new employment laws, such as the Working Time Regulations, statutory National Minimum Wage and the Fairness at Work proposals through the Employment Relations Act, illustrate new regulations which apply to all organisations to some degree.

Once SMEs realise they require assistance, it can be difficult for them to determine what is appropriate and what is available locally.

- Information and guidance of a general nature can be available from many sources including enforcement agencies, Inland Revenue, Environmental Health, local planning offices, Chambers of Commerce and other business, trade and professional bodies.
- Local Business Links may offer support specific to an organisation's needs.
- In regard to core skill training, TECs or their agents may offer Investor in People (IiP) related planning.
- Local FE colleges and other trainers may provide courses that are pertinent to the SMEs' current requirements.

Better sources of information, advice and training to smaller organisations have enabled those colleges willing to make the long-term investment in developing relationships with such key local sources to largely overcome this barrier.

The SME's need for assistance may result in raising a requirement to purchase some training. As with any size of organisation, well organised SMEs may raise the need for some training subsequent to making a review of an aspect of their business. Examples of when such reviews occur are:

- prior to making a capital purchase of equipment to make their production processes more efficient
- prior to making improvements in the way in which their administration functions work
- prior to securing a specific sales contract of relatively large value, perhaps to supply a larger organisation which may stipulate that specific qualifications are to be held.

Organisations may also require training on an ad hoc basis, perhaps arising from a chance conversation within the organisation or by picking up a leaflet at a college 'taster' event.

Once the need for training and development has been recognised, the smaller organisation often hits another substantial barrier when trying to evaluate training and development provision from potential external suppliers. Questions arising may include:

- Do local courses incorporate curriculum elements or content, to practical standards?
- Do local courses lead to the award of qualifications, and if so, what is the wider recognition of the qualifications offered?

Those typical smaller firms without training specialists on their payrolls, may well have insufficient resources or capability to match their analysed needs with the available courses which are supported locally. They require colleges to offer courses that are well backed up by college staff, who know their subject and who can help firms relate the course contents to their work situation. The smaller firm typically needs assistance to ensure that course objectives match the potential trainee's needs as well as the smaller firm's own organisational needs. Perhaps, the more successful colleges have:

- developed a sound understanding of training standards and practical curriculum development, perhaps in partnership with appropriate national training organisations
- organised for staff and other resources to be available to provide key assistance during SMEs' preliminary, pre-purchase stage of course evaluation.

Ways in which clustering could help

The colleges which were surveyed described where SMEs had formed 'clusters', for instance, where they trade within a specifically regulated sector or have some other common bond or goal which motivates individual organisations to work in collaboration. Clustering can now follow a strict methodology and incorporate recent philosophies, but is used in this project more in the form of groupings which share common interests. For instance, a cluster of SMEs can have the common bond of having purchased from the same computer software or courseware supplier or training establishment. Another such bond is where the clustered SMEs serve the same customer, which is a major organisation.

The survey responses were unclear on how the clusters, which they referenced, came to be formed or how clusters developed relationships with outside organisations, for instance with colleges. No mention was made of the ways in which clusters could build links with their shared major customers to determine their training needs for learning purposes.

Clustering can enable purchases to be made jointly, perhaps at a discount. This can enable those within the cluster to benefit, compared with the cost of individually made purchases, and perhaps form a reduction in their pre-purchase evaluation work. Joint purchasing may also save the providing organisation's resource, as they can deal with their customers on a larger scale, with fewer individual orders.

For example, SMEs purchasing training and assistance jointly from colleges may reduce their purchasing and associated costs, while the colleges may be able to reduce their pre-sales resource by dealing with a cluster of collaborating SMEs.

Clustering can also enable those within it to have market and economic information collated and shared jointly, to the mutual benefit of all concerned. This may also enable the cluster to share such information with those with regional influence and at national and government levels, perhaps in conjunction with the forthcoming national Small Business Service. However, there may be few quickly gained benefits for those within the cluster. It can take a lengthy period to forge relationships which are sufficiently deep to have the trust to share information and ideas, and to gain from collaboration. Relationships have to be built, not only between the firms within the cluster, but also jointly with organisations external to it.

The investment required by colleges, for their provision to local SMEs

The key issue for colleges is that building up a sound provision of training and development for smaller firms takes a great deal of investment, with little financial return. Supplying SMEs with a service which is effective to them requires a delivery infrastructure to be set up and then sustained on what may remain a fairly low level of sales income. Many colleges now need to capitalise on their early investment, so that they may best continue building effective, long-term relationships with their local employers and communities. The investment to integrate ICT into the supply to smaller firms provision may enable more flexible learning and wider access, but it will not change the fact that supplying smaller firms is labour intensive.

Appendix 1
Detailed responses to survey questions

In addition to the statistical information provided by survey respondents provided further comment on the topic questions. These are reproduced below. Although multiple responses of a similar nature have not all been recorded, a representative selection of comments has been given.

Q1 Is your college involved with any FEFC Ufi pilot funding?

- Support the development of interactive learning in college using new technology (ICT).
- Improving communications/data transfer between college sites – internet capability for delivery and resourcing of courses.
- Improving online college systems.
- Collaborative project to develop materials (five colleges involved).
- Development of electronic course directory; marketing of directory on local work sites; development of e-mail enquiries.
- Appraisal of basic skills software for online use.
- To develop the necessary infrastructure to deliver training via a learning intranet that underpins distributed learning.
- Purchase of hardware to assist with internet connections.
- Establishment of in-house production facility, multi-media authoring, production of our own online learning materials.
- The only FEFC funding has been the allocation to link all colleges for preparation of Ufi.
- Learning support and customer care for Ufi.
- From the allocation to all colleges – used for our distance learning website project.
- Construction of website for consortium colleges.

Q2a Is your college involved in FEFC projects?

- Building pathways project encompassing a number of other organisations. Digital centre development.
- Supported learning summer school (lead); widening participation (support); regional collaboration study (support).

- Project 1 – as a part of a consortium of colleges providing personal development plans and training to companies in the electronics industry. Project 2 – the establishing of an SME support service on a local industrial estate.
- Development of innovative modes of delivery, using information and learning technology, especially for work with SMEs. Development of electronic access for students to obtain information about programmes to meet their needs.

Q2b Is your college involved in Centre of Excellence?

- Consortium of colleges (nine) to develop computer integrated manufacture facilities.
- Provision of CAD facilities as part of a sub-region-wide Centre of Excellence.
- To create training facilities in multi-media/broadcast technology and to promote the transfer of these technologies from specialisms to routine business applications.
- 'Skills Challenge project' to set up an intranet with twelve engineering companies, to support training and development in IT.
- Local Chamber of Commerce project to establish IT design and consultancy for SMEs. College involvement in connecting to two SMEs, to pilot online learning.
- Establishing a virtual Centre of Excellence by linking colleges and HE facilities and developing a call centre.

Q2c Is your college involved in relevant ESF ADAPT projects?

- Partner in ADAPT 3 project which is looking at how learning in SMEs can be enhanced with the application of a CAT system.
- Learners at work project – cross-county project looking at training employees in key areas – research project with minor delivery pilot.
- Establish information and resource centre for health and safety and environment. Develop intranet and learning platform for delivery of online learning materials in conjunction with six other colleges.
- Support was given for an ADAPT project focusing on the development of SME support structures. The basis of this is a process of 'cluster development' whereby the capacity of SMEs to develop is evaluated by collaborative work with other similar SMEs.
- ADAPT 'Flexiserve' project – developing online training modules for SMEs.
- Business Training Network. This project develops and tests 'best practice' in supporting SMEs in the delivery of training, using ICT and the call centre model to provide 'one-stop' services. The college is working in a consortium.
- Transnational project for CD-ROM/internet development for SMEs. CD-ROM-based training of SMEs in basic and business skills.

Q2d Is your college involved in relevant Objective 4 projects?

- Establishing network of SMEs around a large employer to pass on best practice, and to provide subsidised training to the SMEs in the network established, of a similar nature to training undertaken by the large company.
- Ufi Innovative Keyskills Multi-media project. Leading project with adult education, other FE colleges in TEC area and sixth-form college researching existing materials to support Key Skills delivery by multi-media and establishing gaps. Key workers in agriculture, food and care industries. Provision of key worker training in training, assessment and basic vocational training advice across these industries.
- Projects which will provide Training Needs Analysis (TNA) with training in IT and management to SMEs. Project to provide TNA plus training to small voluntary sector groups.
- Recruitment of staff in non-traditional areas. Skills development for the flexible labour market. Networks to anticipate and address labour market issues in the 21st century.
- Key workers for change – training supervisors and managers. Setting up business partnerships. Working for change – upskilling workforce. Assistance with IiP.
- CD-ROM-based training for SMEs in travel and tourism sector.
- NVQ construction training targeted at SMEs, funded for 1998 and 1999.
- A national project to produce introductory footwear training materials in distance learning form, and to pilot them in remote locations, providing coaching and assessment training to supervisory staff.

Q3 Are you involved in any other projects which you consider relevant?

- Teleworking/telematics for learners in remote locations with a variety of technical, business planning requirements (lead) FEFC funded. Employee skills project (partnership) – TEC/Chamber supported – basic, Key Skills training. ADAPT (Microlink 2000) online training/ business support for SMEs. Chamber-colleges partnership.
- Collaborative project to establish a county-wide college infrastructure to encourage the flow of materials, particularly for SMEs (Government Office funded). A local initiative of a 'skills for life' within local manufacturing plant (part employer: part FEFC funded).
- Skills Challenge: 'online, on-site'. To develop a mobile classroom, with ICT laptops and server – facilities to allow SMEs to become familiar with potential of ICT, and to develop skills in using ICT and to use ICT to access other learning opportunities. Quality in Information and Learning Technology (QUILT) project: to develop staff skills in developing and supporting online learning.
- Leonardo Da Vinci 1998 – Adding value to SMEs through the use of human relations, and counselling skills in management.

- College involved as a partner in single regeneration budget (SRB) partnership from 1995–98 concerned with economic regeneration of immediate area and including upskilling/reskilling of local business employees.
- Provision of internet access PC's training and support of SMEs under Skills Challenge. Inclusion and outreach of prospective trainers and employees to assess potential and aptitude to enter the multi-media sector (under wider collaboration).
- New Deal. Project aims to help young people find work/improve employment prospects through full-time education and training.
- Career Development Centre with college, careers service and TEC. (High street access point and guidance centre.) Employee development scheme – employer and TEC funded – with college and several others (six-week courses as 'tasters' for personal development). 'Learning in the New Millennium' – TEC Competitiveness Fund – with colleges (college internet development with supporting infrastructure).
- One-year local project for staff of courses to be seconded to local industry for upskill and reskill in vocational areas. Funded from college money.

Q4 Does your college have the capability to support Ufi core activity 1?

The following selection of quoted responses is provided regarding the colleges' capacity to support Ufi core activity 1 – to analyse the needs of the market and potential customers.

- Access to all relevant DfEE, TEC, county and borough information enhanced by intelligence gathered through the college community-based programming project which conducts research and consultation with local strategic partners.
- Involved in Objective 4 project which will enhance capabilities.
- Very small college, but we have just developed an external division which is growing.
- We undertake this analysis using data from local authority, TEC, Chamber of Commerce and direct marketing sources.
- Employer liaison groups, extensive local consultation, key local employers represented on board, access to TEC-led employer liaison groups and Labour market intelligence (LMI) report, college produces annual LMI analysis.
- Key partner in local partnerships to interrogate LMI. ADAPT Ufi bid will enhance the capacity of the local Chamber of Commerce and we will draw on this increased capacity.
- Direct links with industry through Industrial Liaison Groups and online links to SMEs.

- College's marketing section maintains a bank of local and regional LMI which is used to inform the college's strategic planning. In addition to desk-research, the marketing section commissions and/or undertakes primary research into local labour market needs. The college also has a community marketing assistant whose brief is to identify training gaps within the local communities.
- Close relationship with the district council which conducts a considerable amount of market research.
- Use LMI plus employer information via focus groups. Informs/directs short course provision. College carries out TNA for local companies. Provides psychometric testing to support Human Resources (HR) development needs in local companies.

Q5 Does your college have the capability to support Ufi core activity 2?

The following selection of quoted responses is provided regarding the colleges' capacity to support Ufi core activity 2 – to drive the demand for learning through mass marketing and promotion.

- Experience of running 'taster' programmes. Experience of using all types of media except television. Direct promotional events in the local shopping centre. Roadshow offering career advice and course information. Visiting local supermarkets and so on. Regular advertising of courses and events, including national advertising.
- Access to local shopping mall, local adult education centres and the use of a college mobile publicity unit.
- Operate on a regional basis. Produce a wide range of publicity materials. Involved with trade organisations and training organisations which helps with marketing.
- The college does not have the staffing capacity for mass marketing and promotion.
- Brochures, direct mail to business and follow up telephone calls.
- Have a high street learning shop for training in computing and business administration (30,000 plus FEFC units delivered through it). Link with other FE providers to mount county approach.
- College offers promotion and advice sessions in shopping precincts on occasional basis and regularly at summer fairs. Established tele-marketing unit, promoting services and signposting via organised events and participation in training initiatives.
- College is able to organise good press and PR activities. These activities are limited by funding availability. The college has very good local links, but funding is always an issue.
- The college has good local PR links. Offers 'tasters' to various local schools' 16-year-old students, plus usual Open Days. 'Trial evenings' for part-time programmes – 'try first, pay later'.

- College has contracts with local radio for extensive broadcast advertising. Mobile IT facilities allow the quick deployment of resources at any location. Also employ telesales techniques to promote college initiatives.
- Engaged agencies and responded to plans for promotion. The college operates a community education service with development workers working with community groups to develop the demand.

Q6 Does your college have the capability to support Ufi core activity 3?

The following selection of quoted responses is provided regarding the colleges' capacity to support Ufi core activity 3 – to provide people with information, advice and guidance.

- Town centre enquiry shop open six full days per week and with 24-hour answering service. 199 local businesses are subscribing members to our key club which offers discounted training for staff. ADAPT project links start-up businesses to large organisations and provides mentors.
- Limited opportunities for general adult population. The facilitators in the new centre of excellence should provide general guidance and sign-posting to all clients. Very little activity directly with SMEs.
- Wide access to internet from colleges' facilities.
- All year college advice line, with reference to subject specialists and Student Services staff. Advice line is a dedicated number.
- We have five staff who advise the public on courses. This includes a small telesales team who are very proactive.
- Town centre information and advice for individuals. Dedicated unit with direct telephone lines for business information and advice.
- Identified post holder to provide information, guidance and advice, and channel enquiries through to appropriate vocational areas. College website provides information and links. Other teams within college interface with individuals and businesses, as part of their responsibilities.
- Designated senior tutor (adult students). Designated adult student advisor. Access course tutor. Guidance and support in community-based training centres. Web page with substantial information on adult courses. Open Day promotional events.
- Complete service to SMEs via internet skills analysis. All college departments have website. Collaborate with local authority on delivery of education and training through (local college) website.
- Extensive support section managed by assistant principal. Work is in partnership with the careers service, the TEC, the Chamber of Commerce and others. Commercial unit carries out training needs analysis on consultancies.

Q7 Does your college have the capability to support Ufi core activity 4?

The following selection of quoted responses is provided regarding the colleges' capacity to support Ufi core activity 4 – to ensure availability of, and connect customers to, high quality learning programmes.

- Four local collaborative projects mapping curriculum provision across the area will secure some rationalisation and identify clear progression routes and gaps to be filled. Part of Learning Net concept to create a single source online for all information needs relating to education and training and services to support business. This is the big vision – Ufi in reality.
- College operates over 1000 distinct courses covering all levels from pre-NVQ to NVQ5 and beyond. Subject matter covers all traditional FE areas and selected HE areas. The college operates on 20 sites across the borough. All programme areas score two with FEFC. All HE areas score highly with HEFCE.
- Operate a 'consortium approach' with the other two FE colleges to provide connections between courses. Progression routes have been considered between the colleges, in specific areas e.g. modern languages.
- Good relationships with local university and progression arrangements with two of them. Course working with employer groups and companies leads to progression into work or onto training schemes.
- The Centre of Excellence should increase college capability.
- College is linked with partners through: a youth credit brokerage – links with TECs and employers; a New Deal consortium – all colleges, TEC, careers service; university – associate college offering degrees, HNDs and HNCs.
- The college has fostered partnerships with other local providers and is a member of a consortium of nine colleges to provide a learning intranet and develop materials for the same. Links in place with HE providers to enhance progression routes and with local industry for recruitment, work placement and employment opportunity.
- The college has progression from Adult Education contact and community centres. Also upward bound project for GCSE students, providing route to HE. Also provides progression to several universities.

Q8 Does your college have the capability to support Ufi core activity 5?

The following selection of quoted responses is provided regarding the colleges' capacity to support Ufi core activity 5 – to commission new content, e.g.where there are gaps in supply versus demand.

- New courses are periodically implemented to satisfy the need of individual adult learners and 'user groups'. The composition of such courses may reflect specific needs e.g. IT training for NHS Trust employees.

- The Workplace Training Unit is actively involved in developing and trailing new and innovative training programmes in response to market trends and customer needs. Many new courses are submitted to awarding bodies for accreditation.
- New programmes are developed to meet identified needs, especially in the business sector where training is demand-led.
- The college is constantly reviewing its portfolio, and either using existing 'off-the-shelf' courses or customised courses to plug the gaps.
- This would be limited by the various resources available and whether the college had expertise in the area where new content was to be commissioned.
- The college has limited ability to develop new provision within the current resource allocation. However, this does not reflect capability and the college has implemented new provision this year in respect of management training with special emphasis on disability aspects.
- The college uses labour market information to inform strategic planning. Gaps that are identified in the curriculum provision are analysed and the college will act swiftly to respond to all demands.
- It is expensive and time-consuming, but specialist short courses are provided.
- Particularly in relation to work-based and employer sponsored provision where the college has significantly expanded its range of services to meet a perceived need.
- We regard expansion of short course programmes in response to need e.g. food hygiene, health and safety, first aid. We also regard development of NVQs and business courses.
- FE colleges in the county are sharing development of new packages.
- We are able to produce new content in some areas (such as IT) quite quickly and easily.
- The college is able to produce training material specific to organisation's requirements. We are also able to 'map' this training to national accreditation allowing employees to gain qualifications for company-specific training.

Q9 Does your college have the capability to support Ufi core activity 6?

The following selection of quoted responses is provided regarding the colleges' capacity to support Ufi core activity 6 – to ensure the quality of products and services; of materials during their evaluation and of those being newly developed or commissioned.

- The quality of courses has been ranked highly by FEFC and Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE). The college has a well developed quality assurance (QA) system.

- We are unclear as to what is required in this section, but the college has comprehensive quality assurance procedures and policies for which the Director of Quality is responsible.
- We are uncertain as to the meaning of this. The college has not been formally commissioned to QA any product, but (like all colleges) is validated to give a wide range of programmes and holds several 'Kitemarks' e.g. IiP, Basic Skills Agency (x2), ABTA Centre of Excellence.
- The college has a well-established QA system. A number of awarding bodies also provide additional quality assessment of products and services e.g. materials used for computing courses.
- The programmes to SMEs are tailored to suit employers' needs and all programmes are reviewed via the quality procedures within the college. Forms are analysed after each programme, actioned and fed into the quality process. The college ensures that Ufi's 'Kitemarking' function is met and a rigorous self assessment process is used. Specialist quality advisors are appointed to monitor off-site delivery.
- Full cost unit has ISO 9002. The college has IiP. The college has a detailed and documented QA system. It is subject to FEFC Inspection, Higher Education Quality Council (HEQC – now QCA) inspection and TEC audit.
- The college does have rigorous quality procedures in terms of self-assessment, quality standards (ISO, IiP) and so on, but does not as yet have specific arrangements for this delivery model.

Q10 Activity 1: Does your college have partnership arrangements with SMEs?

- Partnership arrangements exist with the Chamber of Commerce, small business club, trade associations (in catering) and local authority Economic Development Forum.
- We work closely with a number of SMEs particularly in engineering and business studies areas.
- We have established a local consortium to promote and steer the Learning Net projects and currently have 50 SMEs as 'founder members' with a target membership of 200 SMEs by the end of 1999. Some employers are 'key partners' and have made contributions, in cash or kind, to support these developments.
- We have strong links: projects/collaboration; work experience; in company NVQs; enterprise links/focus groups; Modern Apprenticeships; Business Luncheon Club and databases (various).
- Customised learning for one employer (Spanish). Business Links database (extensive). Business Associates Scheme. Good contacts/ involvement with local business, but limited training service provided. SMEs send employees to some of our evening courses e.g. computerised accounts.

- The college leads a Partnership Steering Group whose members include SMEs and larger organisations in the district. The main aim currently is the development of an enhanced business centre, a 'one-stop shop' for local businesses offering counselling, education and training (including access to the Government's Lifelong Learning initiatives).
- Training services are provided in conjunction with local training providers (commercial companies).
- We run our own farm, horticultural unit, riding school and golf course. Partnership with SME in Spain.
- We have franchising arrangements with a number of SMEs.
- Supply chains for large local companies. SME/Chamber of Commerce links/Business Link.
- A number of partnerships with SMEs – currently under offsite collaborative agreements, through European-funded activities and through commercial projects. Provided short and long courses, mostly leading to vocational qualifications as well as an NVQ assessment and internal verification service.
- Young Enterprise – students working with local SMEs.
- Employees working towards NVQs. Assessors make visits to the workplace.
- Training group with the college; industry placements with SMEs, wide network of supporting SMEs.
- Partnership arrangements with employer groups. ISDN networks with SMEs. All relate to the manufacturing sector.
- Longstanding tradition of working with SMEs on training. (See Question 7).
- Integral partners in the development of a number of SME clusters. Developing learning centres and supported learning programmes in the workplace. ICT is viewed as a vital vehicle for this.
- We are in discussion with the local Business Forum and Education Business project on opportunities.
- It depends what you mean by 'in partnership with'. We have a very little OCP work, of which some is with SMEs.
- In-company training for local SMEs – traditional and company-specific programmes.
- The college provides training for local SMEs and a member of a number of local organisations which involve SMEs e.g. SRB Employer group, Chamber of Commerce. There are also placement and work experience arrangements and local employers have advised the college on proposed vocational developments.

- The college has a strong track record in serving the needs of SMEs in the district. Success in the engineering sector in particular encourages us to apply for further funding via 'Skills Challenge' (DfEE). We are now embarking on a major marketing campaign to promote 'higher level skills' to SMEs in the sector in partnership with the local Chamber of Commerce.
- The college delivers a range of NVQs in partnership with/and based SMEs. College works in partnership with SMEs to provide work experience of up to one year for full-time students on sandwich programmes leading to NDs and HNDs.
- The college has strong relationships with numerous care homes, clothing companies, and has established a unique and flourishing relationship with a company specialising in care for the disabled. The college also has close links with the local Education Business Partnership.
- We are using TNA to determine needs, a partnership has been set up to deliver training and advice to over 100 SMEs within the last two years.
- This is patchy and mainly at school level within the college. Currently a more co-ordinated approach is being developed.
- We have short courses for SMEs. We also have a care consortium with employers, but it is mainly statutory and voluntary and not SMEs.
- There is a range of NVQ in the workplace provision and full-cost provision in areas including health and safety, new technologies and HRD. Involvement in basic and Key Skills in the workplace by: TEC project and Key Skills online – supported by ADAPT.
- We have had regeneration partnerships (since 1994) plus ADAPT clusters in 1999.
- Plumbers, engineers, management/IT, Modern Apprenticeships. Partnership with Chamber of Commerce.
- It is mainly in the joint partnership with a private training agency.
- The college has membership of Chamber of Commerce. It has some experience of tailor-made training for local SMEs. SMEs participate in college-based Computing for All training. SMEs are represented on the governing body.
- Tailored training for SMEs. Links with Chambers of Commerce and banks. Breakfast seminars for SMEs. Millennium bug training for SMEs.
- We have done surveys and been unsuccessful in attracting SME participation in college or in workplace.
- The college established an engineering training centre which has secured 600,000 in SRB and Skills Challenge funding.
- We work with SMEs on developing materials and piloting new materials.
- We work closely with TEC, Business Connect, Chamber of Commerce and joint seminars and demonstrations are arranged each month. The college also participates in business briefings arranged by the Chamber of Commerce.

Q11 Activity 2: Does your college have involvement in any SME industry supplier chains?

- We are providing courses for companies to get into sourcing and supplying via the internet.
- The college delivers training for large companies and also customised training to SMEs within their supply chains.
- As a provider of education and training to SMEs up and down the food chain.
- Health and safety training for sub-contractors going into certain large company sites.
- Plastics industry. European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) project to reduce over-dependency on vulnerable supply chains.
- The college has invested heavily in a new Gas Training Centre and numerous links with employers in the building trade – we provide the essential training link in their supply chains.
- Not that type of organisation in our area. Many small firms (less than ten people) with myriad of supply centres.

Q12 Activity 3: Does your college have involvement in any related FE sector partnerships involving SMEs?

- We have FE partners for the local collaborative projects doing curriculum mapping and also adult education and local universities; this includes how we are meeting SMEs training needs.
- Various projects: ADAPT, ESF, SRB, ICT collaborative project, Centre for Excellence, community links.
- The college has links with a number of FE colleges to produce a series of initiatives relating to SMEs. These include: marketing initiatives (common leaflets); promotional activities (local trade exhibitions and training exhibitions) and joint trading initiatives involving companies in the local area.
- We are part of a consortium of ten colleges working together under the wider collaboration fund criteria for multi-media developments.
- The college is involved in sector partnerships with other FE providers in industry-specific SME developments (e.g. food and agriculture) and employee development schemes for SMEs.
- College managers project.
- We are a member of a colleges' consortium which was set up to provide training services to SMEs, particularly involving the use of telematics.
- The college consortium is to place PCs in SMEs, develop IT infrastructure, develop learning materials, develop support framework for this learning model and deliver training to SMEs.

Q13 Activity 4: Are you involved in any collaboration or partnership with HE?

- Progression arrangements, joint marketing, 'one-stop-shop' for certain areas of work from entry to HE. International marketing links.
- The college has many links with HE with degrees franchised and/or validated by a number of different HE establishments. Other links include jointly funded projects by DfEE (Centre of Excellence) and Europe (Ufi/ADAPT).
- Compact schemes. Working with university on tutoring and assessing distance learning.
- Member of regional partnership with university and a number of other FE colleges. The partnership works in a collaborative manner to ensure a coherent HE programme is easily available across the region.
- The college has developed a link with an HE provider to deliver an enhanced and flexible transition for students with complex learning support needs. The course is jointly delivered and the impact of technological links on this programme is being evaluated.
- SRB-funded work on linking college graduates level 3 and 4 to SME placement opportunities. This also links with teaching company scheme and local HEIs.
- Very limited arrangements for teaching, although more extensive for curriculum design.

Q14 Activity 5: Does your college offer any methods of direct training to SME staff?

The responses to these questions have been selected on the basis that they appear to report implemented methods of delivery, rather than ones which are as yet untried and untested.

Q14a Do you offer direct training to SME staff on employers' premises?

- Many short courses provided specifically for individual SME employers. These make use of College Business Training Centre, Mobile Training Unit and employers' premises.
- Range of courses for IT training, customer care and language training.
- Variety of specialist training and assessment.
- Extensive experience and involvement of providing a wide range of vocational programmes in a variety of locations. Qualifications delivered range from level 1 to NVQ5.
- Delivery of IT training, management, finance, accounting, telesales, communication training and a wide range of assessment services.
- The college training company delivers bespoke training to companies on their own premises following a training needs analysis plan linked to their business plan.

- Training provided in the following areas: management, fork-lift truck operations, customer service, IT, administration, assessor training, care, health and safety, first aid, basic food hygiene.
- Training is delivered in locations to meet SME needs.
- Visit sites to deliver and assess NVQs.
- A range of methods used with a range of companies. This also involves electronic access.
- Online learning through ISDN connections to five SMEs. Large open learning business and IT workshop accessed by SME employees on voucher basis.
- Work-based assessments for company employees undertaking Modern Apprenticeships.
- The college employs assessors to work in companies to train to NVQ standards. Problem-solving for SMEs on their premises.
- This is addressed at school level, mainly by the Schools of Technology, Construction, Business and Management. A commercial unit is in the process of being set up to co-ordinate these activities.
- NVQs in company, both full cost and FEFC funded and TEC funded. Covers both skills training and assessor/coaching.
- Provision of hardware to local SMEs and helpline support. NVQs are delivered in workplace.
- A developing area of activity, especially in the care sector.
- The college has been involved with TEC-funded projects where we provide training direct to SMEs on their premises using CD-ROM training material and other distance learning packs. The work on the employers' premises involves tutor support.
- Regular ongoing training with a limited number of employers; guidance on work-based evidence collection for students on financial and retail training, market research consultancy, specific management accreditation to employer, customer service, leisure and tourism, assessor training.

Q14b Do you offer direct training to SME staff on college premises?

(Note: some colleges have included their response to this question within their response to Question 14a.)

- Large part-time provision plus full-cost recovery courses through Professional Training Centre.
- A number of SME employees accessing mainstream (part-time) college provision.
- Dedicated Business Training Suite (ten stations) and access to open IT Centre 9 am–9 pm.
- Day release, Modern Apprenticeships.

- Where relevant, to produce workshops available to a number of SMEs. Also where SME staff attend supervisory/management training on college premises.
- Through traditional part-time courses and tailored provision. Day release/block release/distance.
- Training is delivered on college premises in specialist rooms where this is appropriate for single or groups of SMEs.
- The college provides customised IT training for organisations in the college Telematics Centre.
- We recruit significant numbers of staff from SMEs onto many courses – both short, non-accredited and longer accredited courses.
- Open and exclusive courses are provided. Open courses and flexible delivery (including drop-in and distance learning) are more attractive to the micro businesses which predominate. Exclusive courses where there are equipment requirements, firms lack appropriate course accommodation, or employees are drawn from a wide geographic area are also housed in college.

Q14c Does your direct training to SME staff involve work at a distance?

- Most work at a distance would be within the college's 'normal' catchment area.
- Some SME owner-managers and staff will, as a part of their programme of development, be required to conduct self-study.
- Generally this involves portfolio building activities undertaken by the employees with 'hot-line' telephone support given by tutors.
- Three Professional Development Modules are available through the college intranet/internet. Various paper-based flexible learning modules available across the whole curriculum.
- An increasing number of companies use supported distance learning to deliver staff training and NVQs.
- Distance learning for papermakers across the country, leading to HNC block attendance programme.
- The college has an open college to serve this function.
- All courses are supported by a tutor support network. Printed package, CD. A call centre has been developed. E-mail is the preferred method of support.
- The employers are given training packages and other distance learning materials, and work through these on their own, at their own pace, but with tutor support at hand via telephone or e-mail.

Q14d Does your direct training to SME staff involve work using telematic approaches/information and communications technology as a medium?

- Internet and e-mail.
- These approaches are still in the exploratory stage, in line with other colleges leading in this area. Online delivery has been tested, as has e-mail support. Video-conferencing is being developed.
- The college has video-conferencing facilities which have been used to deliver training and is in the process of installing open learning packages in a number of computers, including PC laptops which will be used to deliver training via a mobile unit.
- Independent learning using PC. E-mail contact and support from tutors. Some web-based development on college intranet.
- FEDA QUILT project 'online tutoring' beginning to use e-mail to support students.
- Using the internet has been a solution to some distance learning communication problems.
- Materials originally paper-based and supported by telephone – gradually moving over to learning materials on CD-ROM and support via e-mail.
- Fairly low demand for this type of delivery so far.
- We are very involved delivering training over the internet, designing websites for distance learners.
- We have video-conferencing facilities, but uptake by SMEs has been limited so far.
- CD-ROM training packages, currently mainly in respects of human resource development. Telephone or e-mail support for participants who require help when working through the CD-ROM and workbooks.

Q15 Activity 6: Has your college developed or acquired related teaching or training materials?

- Training materials developed for short vocational programmes. Materials under development for NVQs owner-manager development and related learning modules. Materials also acquired commercially to meet specific needs.
- We have undertaken the development of learning materials using multi-media and ICT but this is on a very small scale and was undertaken primarily so that we developed staff with skills to evaluate published materials and decide whether they should be added to our learning materials bank and whether the producer should be included as a 'Learning Net' supplier. We have purchased a 'virtual campus' which is 'open' in terms of accommodating a wide range of learning products which are a mix of hardware and software i.e. we also bought content and content is the key. Development costs are huge, so our priority is: 1. buy in 2. Buy in and customise 3. develop ourselves.

- Some CD-ROMs – expansion planned.
- The college has an extensive supply of distance learning materials and will, where necessary, produce its own material.
- IT manuals 'off-the-shelf', assessor and verifier awards materials, support materials relating to a range of relevant VQs including: management levels three and four, sales, customer service, administration and IT.
- Training packs developed from project supported by ESF and other funds.
- Recently acquired open learning material (computer-based) to supplement training in management, IT, electronics and engineering, and health and safety. In addition staff are developing open learning packs in business and finance to be delivered via the internet. The college possesses a number of training packs and videos.
- The development of the 'virtual college' in 1995 has resulted in over 6000 documents and associated learning materials. These cover aspects of almost all curriculum areas at a variety of different levels.
- Internal development in high-quality learning materials for use in internet/intranet. Collaboration with other colleges to share development.
- We are looking at example materials for internet delivery.
- Self-developed software for converting traditional materials to online materials. Access to high level (US designed) maths packages. The college is developing a range of materials.
- Mainly purchased and tailored, but also some original materials designed by educational technologists.

Q16 Activity 7: Do you use college-based tutors?

- The Business Training Services division of the college has its own training and consultancy team which comprises industrially-experienced trainers and also appropriate college-based tutors with the relevant NVQ skills and facilitation skills.
- Full-time and part-time lecturers and assessors.
- We feel we can monitor quality if tutors are part of our staff group delivering traditional as well as other courses. This is not appropriate, e.g. for NVQ assessors.
- NVQ and Key Skills assessor work. TNA assessors. Buy in outside consultancy where useful to assist college tutor.
- All SMEs have college-based tutors for part of programme.
- Employ a specially recruited 'personal remote tutor' who 'hot-desks' and works from home – keeps in touch mostly electronically with tutors. Use industrial mentors as tutors.
- This depends upon your definition of 'college-based'. If you mean 'employed by' then all tutors are. However, some will rarely, if ever, come to a main college site. Some work largely from home and run inductions and seminars at a centre. Others work in small community-based centres only.

- College-based tutor delivers across a wide geographic area by a range of mechanisms. Local delivery staff are also used, and we are developing IT facilities through which other providers can also deliver.
- Both permanent staff and a register of associate trainers.
- A team of support tutors has been developed and is expanding steadily to meet demand.

Q17 Activity 8: Has your college developed or acquired SME-based mentors?

- We are committed to identifying 70 SME-based Learning Net co-ordinators (key workers) who will be trained to act as mentors in assisting with cascading learning to fellow employees. We are less convinced about using these people to do assessments whereas they have an important role in supporting the training programme for individual employees including assisting with portfolios.
- Train company employees as work-based assessors so they can mentor and assess in SMEs. College tutors provide internal verification and support for mentors.
- Only with 'Young Enterprise' group – TEC scheme.
- Where relevant, programmes will include the provision of SME-based mentors (e.g. students on NVQ in management programmes) and this is an area of gradual development.
- Through industrial partnerships, Saturday seminars, informal meetings, steering committees, sitting on TEC/ Chamber of Commerce committees with SMEs.
- The college is seeking to develop a strategy whereby more assessment takes place within the SMEs undertaken by qualified assessors who have been trained up and supported by the college. Those assessors would then form part of the college's formal assessment.
- Mentoring programme to and by SMEs linked to large organisations funded by ESF. Mentoring qualifications accredited by university. Institute of Management programmes by SME members.
- Mentors within SMEs are supported by college advisors to ensure the success of the work-based training programmes. Company-based mentors and assessors are invited to regular meetings and training sessions and are able to access training materials at the college.
- Whilst some SME-based mentoring is carried out the college is trying to develop the 'buddy system' on a wider basis.
- Development in certain areas only e.g. hairdressing, care, administration.
- Some training at employers' premises involves mentors from the SMEs.
- SME-based mentors are used where appropriate and when ownership of the training is an issue.

- Students trained by the college may be expected to act as a mentor to other staff in their organisation.
- Based on a network of corporate middle managers operating on a voluntary basis and seeking mutual training and experiential advantage.
- Development consultants provide: advice to the college on curriculum development, assessment of Key Skills; supports the development of new programmes, develops programmes specifically for special needs students; help to cement partnerships with other agencies; prepare students for work experience; lecturing; ESF Objective 4, Priority 2, Measure 1, 1999 Crescent Partnership Bid (mentoring).
- These are necessary for NVQ assessment in particular. Also some management courses mean that mentors are particularly important to give the student full support. We provide support to assessors in workplace in a small number of vocational areas (e.g. sport and recreational, care).

Q18 Describe any good practice developed or lessons learnt from the above activities

- Effective delivery and achievement of NVQs is dependent upon quality of tutorials and mentoring in partnership with employers. Flexi-study provision offering a combination of delivery options is essential. Outreach centres for easy access to train.
- Invest in a large amount of time and energy in selecting a computerised learning system because that is the backbone that supports everything else. Be patient with partners and recognise their agendas may be different, but keep reinforcing common, agreed objectives. ICT is still largely unreliable and aim to minimise online time through locally supported learning.
- Training needs analysis is essential in order to tailor training for customer.
- Critical to have interactive tutor support in 'real time' at the end of online learning. Critical to train staff in electronic tutor support skills to adapt their culture.
- Main lesson learnt is that it takes time for industry/commerce to 'trust' the college. We have lacked credibility and have had to work hard to convince local employers that we have staff with the relevant experience to assist them in managing their businesses.
- Significant amounts of planning and development required. Role of tutor and mentor crucial to success of partnership.
- Named contact person(s); specialist division dealing with commercial activities; flexibility – staffing, courses; dedicated sales team; commitment from management and staff.
- IT is only the medium of delivery – not the panacea of cost-cutting.

- Working with SMEs is time-consuming, frustrating and often unprofitable. If Ufi approaches can partially unlock the issue – excellent. Good materials are essential and are not widely available.
- The importance of developing a good relationship with the organisation, regular contact, establish quality systems and procedures, simple but comprehensive tracking systems, responding quickly to customer needs.
- Students need to feel part of a (virtual) group. Students need to understand the concept of independent learning – it does not suit all. Resources must be clear and concise and let the student see where they are heading.
- The college has invested in an extensive ICT staff development programme. All academic staff received computer hardware (computer, printer, internet access) training as part of this programme. This brought ICT to the curriculum and changed staff views. Without such a programme, embedding IT into the curriculum would not be possible. This has created an infrastructure in the concept and delivery of online learning can be allocated to develop.
- Learner workshops are beneficial. Inductions are essential. Availability of tutors critical – use of answer-phone, e-mail etc. Regular personal contact with tutor helps.
- Lesson learned – online delivery is very difficult to achieve – tutor support is essential. Outreach centre probably critical since typical Ufi students may not be ICT capable/confident and may be shy of colleges.
- Appropriate market research is very scarce – partly because SMEs not aware of the potential. Therefore development of relevant, integrated curriculum is difficult. Help urgently needed on means to end, register, track, assess and fund online learners. Sharing good practice on e-mail tutoring urgently needed.
- Start in a small way e.g. e-mail. All online development is very time consuming. Think long and hard about the platform.
- Allowing SMEs to train and up-skill their workforce on their own premises, at their convenience with college back-up, is a good cost-effective approach to present day pressures of business and commerce. New materials for online working needs commissioning with Key Skills a priority.
- It is very difficult involving SMEs. Good personal relationships and a decent level of subsidy is key.
- Flexibility and awareness of client needs are key. Delivery and achievement need to be quick. Time costs money. Workplace mentors rarely get the time and support they need. Distance learning is a hard option – employers need convincing of this.
- The lessons learnt from the college's involvement with SMEs is that a holistic approach must be used to support the student. High-quality learning materials, tutors who support distance learning as a delivery mechanism and have the vision and expertise to use the new technologies to support the delivery are all essential for the students to be successful.

- Staff are very difficult to obtain in IT field and hence need proactive recruitment.
- A lot of contact with SMEs is required to ensure material content is relevant and updated on a regular basis. Certification via exam boards is too slow to keep up with changes in requirements.
- Apart from regulation driven training it is far from easy. A massive change of attitude by SMEs and greater support for them are required.
- Takes a great deal of time to develop relationships/partnerships with companies. Companies are keen to work with the college if we provide the hardware and teaching staff. Links with TUC are essential.
- Investment in staff development (as well as other resources) is crucial in keeping pace with change.
- Need to challenge traditional FE culture, but also draw on strengths of FE. Importance of 'repackaging' basic skills support and to develop new ways of people accessing learning.
- We now have in place a corporate client strategy that is based across all four faculties within the college. Importance of working in partnership with employers to set clear objectives. Constant monitoring process and review. A major problem is that assessors/mentors move jobs when qualified. No longer offer free assessor training to providers of placements.

Q19 Describe how the above activities fit in with your college policy and strategic plan

- The above activities contribute to the college growth targets and those of widening participation amongst under-represented groups which includes SME staff.
- Part of diversification from core 16–19 activity since 1993.
- The college emphasises vocational education and training in its mission and seeks to increase its non-FEFC income in its strategic objectives. Providing career qualifications and updating is a main thrust of our plans for growth in adult student numbers.
- Mission to become central to community and provide economic development through supporting local businesses. Inclusiveness, flexibility and accessibility by providing local access to learning with a 365-day service to the workplace. Exploring use of ICT to deliver supported learning to large numbers of people which is high quality, cost-effective and lifelong.
- As part of developing links with community/business in the locality. To diversify income sources.
- The college is fully committed, as part of its strategic plan, to developing closer links with local businesses and relevant bodies (e.g. Business Link, TEC, Chambers of Commerce) and much work is going on to achieve this objective.

- Major strategic aim is to increase commercial aspects of college business and increase prosperity for region. SMEs are an integral part of strategic plan.
- Development of new learning processes and embrace IT opportunities. Offer wide range quality learning opportunities. Contribute to local strategies in economic regeneration.
- The use of ICT in learning is one theme of the college strategy. This will provide both new opportunities for learning and allow access to individuals who traditionally were unable to attend college. The shift is away from 'what the college can provide' to 'what learners require'.
- The development of work with employers is inherent to the policy and plans of the college – partly for 'good' policy reasons, but also to reduce dependency on FEFC funding.
- The college has a long-established policy on increasing the accessibility to learning opportunities which is embedded in our strategic plan. Learning centres and outreach delivery are included in this. The college policy has been one of collaboration and partnership working, not competition for some years and this continues. The strategic plan also prioritises working with employers to identify and meet training needs. The requirement to ensure progression and to provide all levels of training from foundation to higher education is also a college policy, based on the need to provide within the large rural area we cover.
- The college's strategic plan includes response to the needs of local employers and widening participation.
- College policy/strategic plan emphasises current core business (full-time 16–19 year olds), together with diversification into niche markets and a vision statement of lifelong learning.
- The college has a specific aim of increasing the amount of curriculum delivered using technology to prepare its students for employment in the 21st century. The college also plans to open learning centres in retail parks which will form a basis for Ufi.
- The college is committed to widening participation, developing commercial activities, and supporting the economic development of the sub-region.

Q20 Describe your view of the proposed Ufi functions and how far work by your college supports these

A representative selection of quoted responses to this question is now provided, which complement the responses the colleges provided for each of the six Ufi core functions (see Questions 4–9).

- Ufi functions provide an essential focus on learning activity, which is difficult to achieve when acting as a sole provider, needing to develop tailored learning programmes. The college aims, and activities, strive to support Ufi functions because of the need to provide lifelong learning to business employees, particularly in a rural economy dependant on a large number of often remote small businesses.

- We welcome being part of Ufi development. Especially if it improves employee/employer access to training in smaller establishments.
- We are already fulfilling all the Ufi functions through the projects we are currently operating. They make sense and, if we are not thwarted by the technology or lack of funding, we will be successful. A modular, unitised post-16 curriculum would help focus energy and ensure standards and consistency.
- The Ufi functions are sound. They need rigour, appropriate capital and revenue funding formulae (capital allocations above are insufficient to promote longevity).
- We are extremely supportive since we have a rural cohort and the area has assisted area status. High rates of unemployment. Training needs are great.
- The proposed Ufi functions will be particularly useful as a 'broker' service for course information, guidance and progression. The college supports the development, particularly if the Ufi can 'Kitemark' the quality of courses registered.
- The concept of Ufi fits into the college activities well. However, the pilot project offers taster courses that do not attract funding from FEFC and only 25% transfer to a course that does. As a fairly small college we can not afford to subsidise 'tasters' at this rate.
- I agree with the main thrust of the Ufi functions. Work by my college in this line is still in embryonic form. Its physical size is an obstacle to large-scale development; its mission statement is primarily orientated to 16–19 year olds.
- The focus of this questionnaire has been on SMEs. It will be impossible to separate them from the general public who will want to use Ufi learning opportunities for a multitude of reasons. The Ufi needs branding and marketing as the adult education opportunity of the next century.
- The functions are sound. The plan to deliver them via an Open University-type Learning Centre will marginalise the major contribution FE can make to the success of Ufi
- We operate in one of the least densely populated areas in the UK. The Ufi is a critical stimulus to encouraging education and training in rural areas, where distance and small company size often depresses demand.
- They are all laudable, but the model assumes a well-developed service level without any guarantee of the revenue streams to achieve it.

Q21 Describe any other college links with industry and business

A representative selection of quoted responses to this question is now provided which should be read in conjunction with the partnership details provided in the responses to Question 10 above.

- We are lead partners on New Deal with strong links in the community through a local partnership which includes private and public sector employers. The Services to Business Unit provides short courses and the college overall has links with industry through consultative panels, work placements, part-time lecturers and course committees.
- College business partnerships, advisory groups, governors, extensive training links, attendance at business forums, proactively contacting and seeking employers' views on training and development.
- As potential sponsors (prospectus, drama productions, equipment); travel agents on site – a real business; as work experience providers (NVQ and GNVQ); representatives as members of the corporation.
- We have an extensive work-shadowing scheme linked with local industry and business. There are about 500 placements a year from the college.
- The college has an extensive Business Associates Scheme and Business Links database. Local industry supports the college – finance, sponsorship, work experience and visiting speakers. A Business Links manager is in the post and attends various meetings.
- The college has many links with industry and business related to full-time student programmes, e.g. work experience, Young Enterprise, mock interviews etc. Such organisations also sponsor various events and capital projects at the college.
- We have many links with industry for work-shadowing, placements, curriculum input and we are starting to have more contact through lettings of premises and facilities and provision of short courses.
- All vocational areas have links with relevant businesses. The college governors are mostly industrial/commercial people. Many companies send students to the college and links are established through these. In short we are similar to most FE colleges.

Appendix 2
Statistical response to survey

The survey of 456 FE colleges in England and Wales was undertaken in October 1998. Questionnaires were sent out to colleges. The responses of 116 colleges, from the 120 that responded, are now presented within regions, as a refinement of the previous overall analysis of England and Wales. The four responses from Wales and the Channel Islands are included within the overall figures, but are excluded from the regional breakdown.

Q1 Is your college involved with any FEFC Ufi pilot funding?

	Number in sample	% Yes	% No	% Missing
Greater London	12	0	100	0
East	11	18.2	81.8	0
South East	21	52.4	42.9	4.7
South West	9	22.2	66.7	11.1
Yorkshire & Humberside	22	31.8	59.1	9.1
West Midlands	11	27.3	72.7	0
East Midlands	11	27.3	72.7	0
North	8	12.5	75	12.5
North West	11	45.5	54.5	0
England & Wales	120	28.3	67.5	4.2

Q2a Is your college involved in FEFC projects?

	Number in sample	% Yes	% No	% Missing
Greater London	12	16.7	41.7	41.6
East	11	9.1	63.6	27.3
South East	21	14.3	38.1	47.6
South West	9	22.2	44.4	33.4
Yorkshire & Humberside	22	36.4	40.9	22.7
West Midlands	11	18.2	54.5	27.3
East Midlands	11	9.1	36.4	54.5
North	8	12.5	50	37.5
North West	11	27.3	36.4	36.3
England & Wales	120	20	44.2	35.8

Q2b Centre of Excellence?

	Number in sample	% Yes	% No	% Missing
Greater London	12	16.7	33.3	50
East	11	9.1	54.5	36.4
South East	21	14.3	28.6	57.1
South West	9	11.1	55.6	33.3
Yorkshire & Humberside	22	9.1	59.1	31.8
West Midlands	11	0	72.7	27.3
East Midlands	11	18.2	36.4	45.4
North	8	12.5	25	62.5
North West	11	18.2	27.3	54.5
England & Wales	120	11.7	45	43.3

Q2c Relevant ESF ADAPT projects?

	Number in sample	% Yes	% No	% Missing
Greater London	12	33.3	25	41.7
East	11	36.4	45.5	18.1
South East	21	19	23.8	57.2
South West	9	77.8	0	22.2
Yorkshire & Humberside	22	54.5	13.6	31.9
West Midlands	11	27.3	45.5	27.2
East Midlands	11	18.2	45.5	36.3
North	8	50	0	50
North West	11	63.6	9.1	27.3
England & Wales	120	40	23.3	36.7

Q2d Relevant Objective 4 projects?

	Number in sample	% Yes	% No	% Missing
Greater London	12	33.3	25	41.7
East	11	63.6	18.2	18.2
South East	21	14.3	47.6	38.1
South West	9	22.2	22.2	55.6
Yorkshire & Humberside	22	18.2	31.8	50
West Midlands	11	9.1	36.4	54.5
East Midlands	11	63.6	27.3	9.1
North	8	12.5	37.5	50
North West	11	27.3	0	72.7
England & Wales	120	27.5	30	42.5

Q4 Does your college have the capability to support Ufi core activity 1, to analyse the needs of the market and potential customers?

	Number in sample	% Yes	% No	% Missing
Greater London	12	83.3	16.7	0
East	11	100	0	0
South East	21	85.7	14.3	0
South West	9	100	0	0
Yorkshire & Humberside	22	95.5	4.5	0
West Midlands	11	100	0	0
East Midlands	11	100	0	0
North	8	87.5	0	12.5
North West	11	100	0	0
England & Wales	120	94.2	5	0.8

Q5 Does your college have the capability to support Ufi core activity 2, to drive the demand for learning through mass marketing and promotion?

	Number in sample	% Yes	% No	% Missing
Greater London	12	58.3	25	16.7
East	11	90.9	9.1	0
South East	21	85.7	14.3	0
South West	9	88.9	11.1	0
Yorkshire & Humberside	22	81.8	13.6	4.6
West Midlands	11	90.9	9.1	0
East Midlands	11	90.9	9.1	0
North	8	75	12.5	12.5
North West	11	100	0	0
England & Wales	120	84.2	12.5	3.3

Q6 Does your college have the capability to support Ufi core activity 3, to provide people with information, advice and guidance?

	Number in sample	% Yes	% No	% Missing
Greater London	12	91.7	8.3	0
East	11	100	0	0
South East	21	76.2	19	4.8
South West	9	88.9	11.1	0
Yorkshire & Humberside	22	86.4	9.1	4.5
West Midlands	11	90.9	9.1	0
East Midlands	11	100	0	0
North	8	87.5	0	12.5
North West	11	100	0	0
England & Wales	120	90	7.5	2.5

Q7 Does your college have the capability to support Ufi core activity 4, to ensure availability of, and connect customers to, high quality learning programmes?

	Number in sample	% Yes	% No	% Missing
Greater London	12	75	16.7	8.3
East	11	90.9	9.1	0
South East	21	76.2	19	4.8
South West	9	88.9	11.1	0
Yorkshire & Humberside	22	95.5	4.5	0
West Midlands	11	90.9	9.1	0
East Midlands	11	90.9	9.1	0
North	8	62.5	25	12.5
North West	11	100	0	0
England & Wales	120	86.7	10.8	2.5

Q8 Does your college have the capability to support Ufi core activity 5, to commission new content?

	Number in sample	% Yes	% No	% Missing
Greater London	12	66.7	33.3	0
East	11	100	0	0
South East	21	66.7	33.3	0
South West	9	77.8	22.2	0
Yorkshire & Humberside	22	86.4	13.6	0
West Midlands	11	81.8	9.1	9.1
East Midlands	11	81.8	18.2	0
North	8	75	12.5	12.5
North West	11	81.8	18.2	0
England & Wales	120	79.2	18.3	2.5

Q9 Does your college have the capability to support Ufi core activity 6, to ensure the quality of products and services, for example where brokered or commissioned by Ufi?

	Number in sample	% Yes	% No	% Missing
Greater London	12	83.3	16.7	0
East	11	81.8	9.1	9.1
South East	21	76.2	23.8	0
South West	9	88.9	11.1	0
Yorkshire & Humberside	22	77.3	22.7	0
West Midlands	11	81.8	9.1	9.1
East Midlands	11	72.7	18.2	9.1
North	8	62.5	12.5	25
North West	11	90.9	9.1	0
England & Wales	120	79.2	15.8	5

Q10 Activity 1: Does your college have partnership arrangements with SMEs?

	Number in sample	% Yes	% No	% Missing
Greater London	12	75	25	0
East	11	90.9	9.1	0
South East	21	71.4	19	9.6
South West	9	66.7	11.1	22.2
Yorkshire & Humberside	22	68.2	18.2	13.6
West Midlands	11	90.9	9.1	0
East Midlands	11	81.8	9.1	9.1
North	8	62.5	25	12.5
North West	11	100	0	0
England & Wales	120	76.7	15.8	7.5

Q11 Activity 2: Does your college have involvement in any SME industry supplier chains?

	Number in sample	% Yes	% No	% Missing
Greater London	12	8.3	75	16.7
East	11	36.4	63.6	0
South East	21	14.3	71.4	14.3
South West	9	22.2	66.7	11.1
Yorkshire & Humberside	22	27.3	72.7	0
West Midlands	11	18.2	81.8	0
East Midlands	11	27.3	54.5	18.2
North	8	37.5	50	12.5
North West	11	36.4	63.6	0
England & Wales	120	25.8	66.7	7.5

Q12 Activity 3: Does your college have involvement in any related FE sector partnerships involving SMEs?

	Number in sample	% Yes	% No	% Missing
Greater London	12	58.3	41.7	0
East	11	72.7	27.3	0
South East	21	47.6	38.1	14.3
South West	9	55.6	22.2	22.2
Yorkshire & Humberside	22	77.3	22.7	0
West Midlands	11	90.9	9.1	0
East Midlands	11	54.5	45.5	0
North	8	50	12.5	37.5
North West	11	63.6	36.4	0
England & Wales	120	63.3	30	6.7

Q13 Activity 4: Are you involved in any collaboration or partnership with HE?

	Number in sample	% Yes	% No	% Missing
Greater London	12	75	16.7	8.3
East	11	100	0	0
South East	21	81	4.8	14.2
South West	9	100	0	0
Yorkshire & Humberside	22	77.3	22.7	0
West Midlands	11	100	0	0
East Midlands	11	81.8	0	18.2
North	8	75	0	25
North West	11	90.9	9.1	0
England & Wales	120	85	8.3	6.7

Q14 Activity 5: Does your college offer any methods of direct training to SME staff?

	Number in sample	% Yes	% No	% Missing
Greater London	12	91.7	8.3	0
East	11	100	0	0
South East	21	76.2	14.3	9.5
South West	9	100	0	0
Yorkshire & Humberside	22	81.8	13.6	4.6
West Midlands	11	90.9	9.1	0
East Midlands	11	90.9	9.1	0
North	8	75	25	0
North West	11	100	0	0
England & Wales	120	87.5	10	2.5

Q14a Do you offer direct training to SME staff on employers' premises?

	Number in sample	% Yes	% No	% Missing
Greater London	11	81.8	18.2	0
East	11	90.9	9.1	0
South East	16	81.3	12.5	6.2
South West	9	100	0	0
Yorkshire & Humberside	18	94.4	0	5.6
West Midlands	10	90	10	0
East Midlands	10	90	10	0
North	6	83.3	16.7	0
North West	11	90.9	9.1	0
England & Wales	105	89.5	8.6	1.9

Q14b Do you offer direct training to SME staff on college premises?

	Number in sample	% Yes	% No	% Missing
Greater London	11	81.8	0	18.2
East	11	100	0	0
South East	16	87.5	0	12.5
South West	9	88.9	11.1	0
Yorkshire & Humberside	18	94.4	5.6	0
West Midlands	10	100	0	0
East Midlands	10	90	10	0
North	6	66.7	16.7	16.6
North West	11	90.9	0	9.1
England & Wales	105	90.5	3.8	5.7

Q14c Does your direct training to SME staff involve work at a distance?

	Number in sample	% Yes	No	Missing
Greater London	11	54.5	45.5	0
East	11	63.6	18.2	18.2
South East	16	50	43.8	6.2
South West	9	88.9	11.1	0
Yorkshire & Humberside	18	66.7	27.8	5.5
West Midlands	10	60	30	10
East Midlands	10	80	20	0
North	6	66.7	0	33.3
North West	11	100	0	0
England & Wales	105	69.5	23.8	6.7

Q14d Does your direct training to SME staff involve work using telematic approaches/information and communications technology as a medium?

	Number in sample	% Yes	No	Missing
Greater London	11	36.4	54.5	9.1
East	11	36.4	63.6	0
South East	16	56.3	31.3	12.4
South West	9	66.7	22.2	11.1
Yorkshire & Humberside	18	66.7	33.3	0
West Midlands	10	80	0	20
East Midlands	10	70	20	10
North	6	83.3	0	16.7
North West	11	81.8	18.2	0
England & Wales	105	61.9	30.5	7.6

Q15 Activity 6: Has your college developed or acquired related teaching or training materials?

	Number in sample	% Yes	No	Missing
Greater London	12	83.3	8.3	8.4
East	11	81.8	18.2	0
South East	21	52.4	23.8	23.8
South West	9	88.9	0	11.1
Yorkshire & Humberside	22	86.4	9.1	4.5
West Midlands	11	81.8	9.1	9.1
East Midlands	11	90.9	0	9.1
North	8	62.5	25	12.5
North West	11	100	0	0
England & Wales	120	79.2	11.7	9.1

Q16 Activity 7: Do you use college-based tutors?

	Number in sample	% Yes	% No	% Missing
Greater London	12	83.3	16.7	0
East	11	81.8	18.2	0
South East	21	57.1	23.8	19.1
South West	9	100	0	0
Yorkshire & Humberside	22	90.9	4.5	4.6
West Midlands	11	81.8	9.1	9.1
East Midlands	11	90.9	0	9.1
North	8	75	12.5	12.5
North West	11	100	0	0
England & Wales	120	82.5	10.8	6.7

Q17 Activity 8: Has your college developed or acquired SME-based mentors?

	Number in sample	% Yes	% No	% Missing
Greater London	12	50	50	0
East	11	54.5	45.5	0
South East	21	42.9	42.9	14.2
South West	9	44.4	44.4	11.2
Yorkshire & Humberside	22	40.9	50	9.1
West Midlands	11	45.5	36.4	18.1
East Midlands	11	54.5	27.3	18.2
North	8	37.5	50	12.5
North West	11	36.4	45.5	18.1
England & Wales	120	45	44.2	10.8

This paper reports on a survey of 456 FE colleges in England and Wales. The survey provides a baseline that can be developed and against which the FE sector's provision for smaller and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) can be measured.

Colleges' views were sought on how they could support the University for Industry (Ufi) initiative and survey responses indicated that Ufi could give a welcome impetus to FE sector work with SMEs.

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